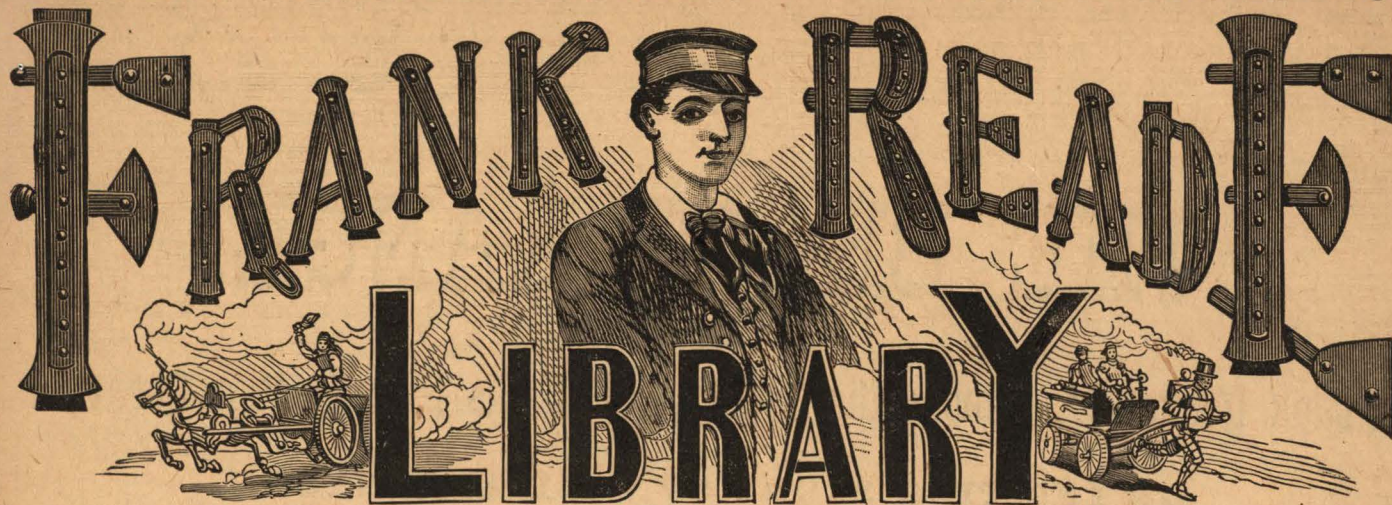


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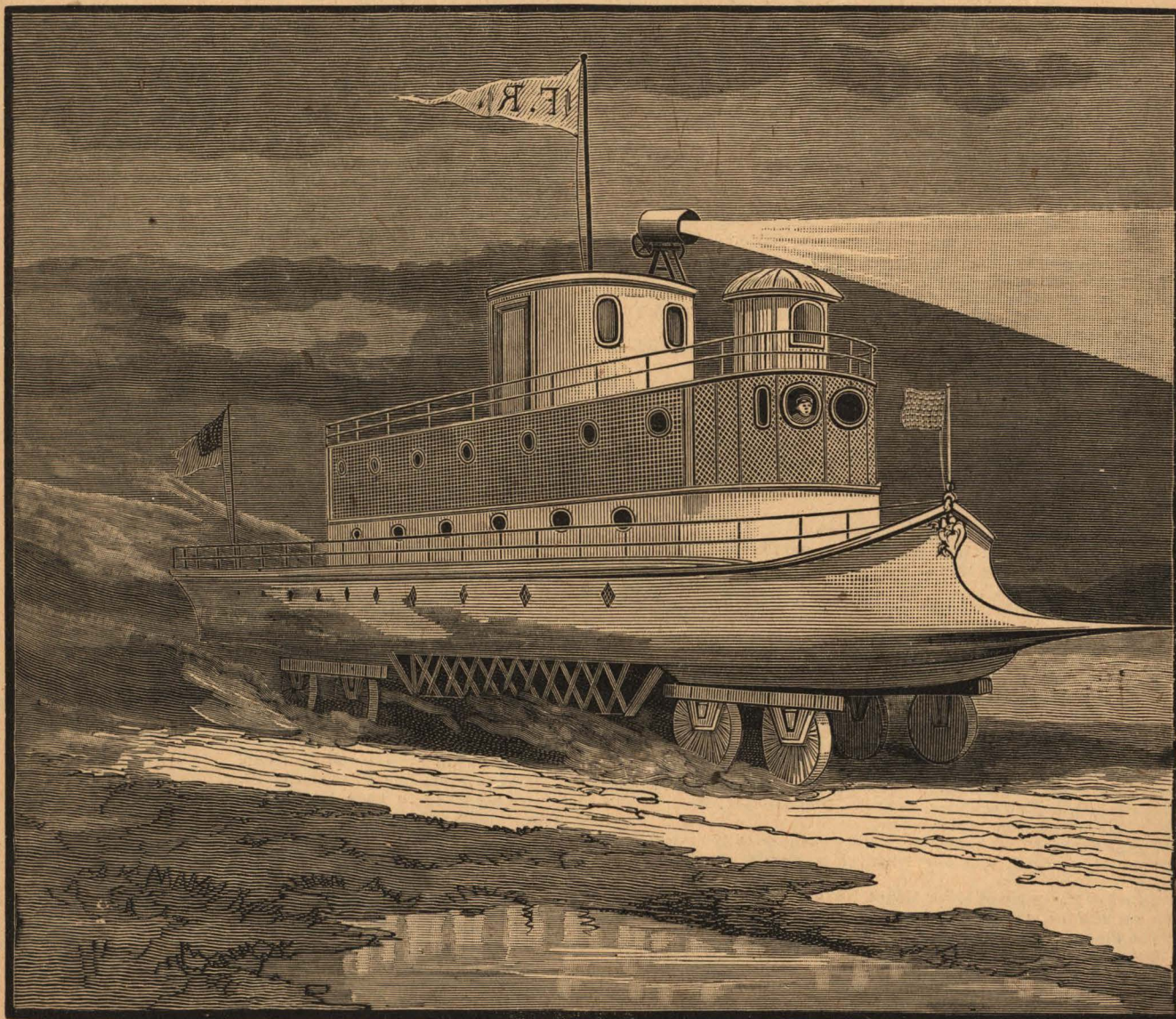
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The Black Range;

or, FRANK READE, JR., AMONG THE COWBOYS
WITH HIS NEW ELECTRIC CARAVAN.

By "NONAME."



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THE BLACK RANGE;

OR,

Frank Reade, Jr., Among the Cowboys With His New Electric Caravan.

AN EXCITING STORY OF WILD ADVENTURE.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr., With His Air Ship in Asia," "Frank Reade, Jr., in the Far West," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

ON THE BLACK RANGE.

"I TELL you, Haven Reed, that we cannot lay this loss of cattle all to the Apaches. The theft is too cleverly executed. I believe it is the work of white men."

The speaker, a tall patrician looking man with a military bearing, sat his mustang like a Centaur and emphasized his words by slapping his saddle pommel with his doubled rawhide riata.

He was Gen. Vaile, the owner of the Black River ranch contiguous to that famous tract of New Mexico grazing country known as the Black Range.

Vaile was not the only cattle herder upon the Black Range.

But his cattle numbered five to any other man's one, and were easily identified by his brand.

Of late dozens of fine cattle had been missed from the herd. It had baffled the best efforts to learn where they had gone to.

At first, very naturally the Apache Indians under Long Lance, who infested a distant mountain chain, were suspected.

There is nothing dearer to the heart of an Apache buck than a slice of good steer's steak and no doubt many a critter did disappear through the agency of the thieving red man.

But it was known that the Long Lance band were hunting one hundred miles further north and still the theft of the cattle went on.

This seemed to disprove the complicity of poor Lo! But what did it mean? Who was the thief?

Haven Reed, the dashing and handsome young ranchero, had exhausted every effort to learn.

Not a clew could be found.

And now at the forcible declaration of the general Reed made reply:

"Whom do you suspect, general?"

"Ah!" replied the ranch owner, with a clouded brow. "Whom should I but our neighbors?"

"Our neighbors?"

"Yes!"

"Pshaw! there are no Greasers hereabouts!"

"Hang the Greasers! Who grazes on the next range to ours?"

"Max Dane, or Black Max as they call him on account of his being a native of this region."

"Black Max! I think I remember him. A dark, scowling fellow who came near pistoling you once?"

"He is the fellow!" replied Haven, with a smile. "He is an ugly customer, Max is. It would be hardly safe to accuse him of the theft."

"Yet, I believe he is the thief!" cried the general, with conviction. "I shall investigate. Call up the boys and let's ride over to the round up!"

Reed blew a small whistle.

In a moment from the ranch sheds, which were built in the form of a triangle, three rough looking fellows sprang. They were instantly in the saddle, and away rode the cavalcade of five men.

The ranch was soon left far behind.

To the westward extended the mighty expanse of the range. Fat out on the horizon, like low lying black clouds, was a mountain range.

This was the range of Black Mountains, and at their base and winding out into the plain flowed the sluggish waters of Black river.

The Black Range was rightly named.

There was even a certain somberness in the air, the hills were of black rock, the river black and silent, and the soil black as ink, while even the grass was of the darkest kind of green.

But the Black Range was a most famous grazing region.

Not in the whole Southwest was its equal to be found.

In a little basin ten miles to the westward several hundred of the cattle had been rounded up.

There was a special reason for this.

It was by Gen. Vaile's orders and the reason therefore shall be seen later.

On at swinging gait rode the Black River Ranch contingent.

Jerry Juke, Snapper Jake, and Vil Decatur were the euphonious names of the three cowboys.

Perhaps half a hundred of these hardy, adventurous cowboys were in Gen. Vaile's employ, but they were far to the northward with other herds there grazing.

Deep Bottom, the place of the round-up, soon began to come into view.

As the party rode on a great drove of cattle could be seen restlessly moving about the plain, while cowboys with snapping whips rode around them to keep them from a stampede.

Soon Gen. Vaile's party rode down into the depression.

As they approached the herd was carefully inspected. Suddenly the general pulled up his horse and cried:

"Look, Reed! is there not one of Dane's cattle?"

"What, that steer with the twisted horn?" cried the ranchero. "No, that is ours!"

"But it can't be. See the brand?"

Reed gazed at the brand in amazement. Then he turned to Decatur and his companions.

"Throw that steer," he said. "I want to examine that brand."

Instantly the three cowboys rode forward. The steer was singled out.

Aloft went their swirling lariats. One circled about the steer's horns and the other about his right leg.

A pull in opposite directions and down went the maddened beast. The tautness of the lariats held him helpless.

And the two men, Reed and Vaile, were enabled to dismount and leisurely inspect the brand.

It was the brand of Black Max, the herder on the next range. For some moments Gen. Vaile studied it.

Then Reed said:

"Did you ever notice any similarity between Dane's brand and ours?"

"There is the same cross mark, but the figure eight——"

"Wait!" said Reed, coolly. "Remove the upper left hand lobe of the eight, and the lower right hand—see—there is our brand!"

An astonished cry burst from Vaile.

The two men exchanged glances.

"That looks like an altered brand!"

"I will take my oath that it is," said Haven Reed, firmly, "for I know this steer to be ours from marks upon him!"

"Then—Max Dane is the thief!"

"Either he or some one of his men!"

Vaile's face was like a thunder cloud.

"We are going to have trouble on account of this, Haven!" he said. "I must see Dane at once and——"

"Ah!" cried the ranchero, excitedly. "Here he comes now!"

Down into the sink rode a dozen armed men.

Lawless-looking fellows they were. At their head rode a tall, mustached and dark-featured man.

He touched his sombrero at sight of Vaile and pulled up his horse.

"Glad to see you, general!" he said. "Fine day on the trail!"

Gen. Vaile ignored the salutation. He was thoroughly stirred up.

"Dane," he said, "I think you and I had better make a wider difference in our brands."

Black Max started, and his face turned black as a thunder cloud.

"Eh!" he exclaimed, sharply. "What are ye driving at?"
 "Our cattle seemed to get mixed up."
 "Wall, yes. My cattle are hard to keep together, for your herd is larger and draws them. But I have no trouble in locating my stock."
 "Indeed!"

"In fact, I hev cum over to-day to drive home some two or three steers of mine yew have over here. Ah! thar's my mark now."

He pointed to the fallen steer. Gen. Vaile looked grim. He put a hand upon his pistol butt, and said quietly:

"Is that your steer, Max?"

"Sartin!"

"Did you ever own a steer with a twisted horn like that one?"

"Why, thet's one mark I well remember."

Gen. Vaile drew a deep breath. He rode his horse a trifle nearer, and looked the dishonest herder straight in the eye.

"Do you really dare to assert that that is your steer?"

Dane's gaze wavered but he replied:

"Of course I do! Do ye mean any insinuation?" threateningly.

"I mean more than an insinuation. I know that the brand has been changed on that steer, and that you are a systematic thief."

Black Max reeled as if dealt a blow.

His evil face was contorted with black hatred and he whipped out a revolver only to look into the death dealing tube of one before him.

"Tarnation an' blazes!" he yelled. "Nobody kin accuse me of that and live."

"I accuse you of it!" thundered Gen. Vaile, "and I demand that you return the cattle you have stolen from me, or it's war to the teeth between you and I henceforth."

For a moment Max Dane cowered before the righteous wrath of the man before him.

Then a jeering laugh escaped his lips.

"Then war it shall be!" he cried. "And curse ye, I'll have yer heart's blood fer this insult to-day, an' you," turning to Reed. "You young whelp, I'll break your spirit too. It is in Black Max's power an' he never leaves the track of them he hates."

With a snarling cry the desperado wheeled his horse. His followers sent up a defiant yell, and all rode away at full speed.

For a moment Gen. Vaile seemed about to send a shot after them. But he restrained himself, and putting up his revolver, turned to Reed.

"Haven," he said, tensely, "I ought to have shot that wretch! We shall now be in constant danger."

"You are right, general," replied the young ranchero, setting his lips firmly after the remark.

"But I have exposed the scoundrel, and I will publish him from one end of New Mexico to the other."

"It will truly be a war between us now," said Haven. "Every man on the range must go armed."

The outlook certainly was not a pleasant one. Suddenly Haven continued:

"I have had my fears of the rascal, general, ever since that insulting letter he sent to Carlotta."

"To Carlotta! to my daughter!" gasped the general. "I knew nothing of that."

"She did not tell you for fear of having trouble with the wretch. But she showed it to me, and it is no harm to tell of it now."

Gen. Vaile was astounded.

"What—what was the character of the letter?" he asked.

"It was a proposal of marriage. Of course, Carlotta did not answer it."

"The audacious scoundrel!" gasped the ranch owner. "I wish I had shot him now. We shall have much to fear from the wretch. I think I had better send Carlotta back to St. Louis at once. This is a bad outlook."

"Gen. Vaile," said Haven Reed, in a strange but resolute voice, "before harm shall come to Carlotta or to you, every man of us will die. Eh, boys?"

The cowboys, who had been interested listeners all this while, opened their throats and cheered.

Every man of them was faithful to their noble employer. All hated the villain Dane. But before Gen. Vaile could thank them a strange thing happened.

There was a rumbling sound in their rear, and the earth trembled.

All wheeled to behold a most astonishing spectacle. Toward them, across the plain, at race-horse speed, came a strange looking vehicle, the like of which they had never before seen.

CHAPTER II.

THE ELECTRIC CARAVAN—THE DETECTIVE.

Six weeks previous to the events just chronicled, in a certain little bustling city in the United States called Readestown, there was quite a little stir of excitement and interest.

The town had been founded by a man who bore the name of Frank Reade, a distinguished inventor whose fame was world wide.

Many strange and curious machines he had invented.

He had rapidly become a man of fortune; but, growing old, his son, Frank Reade, Jr., succeeded him.

This young man was handsome, tall and well formed, and the idol of Readestown.

He was a worthy prototype of his father, and went on inventing air-ships and other wonderful things.

But for some months past he had been employed upon a new invention.

In the extensive shops used solely for the manufacture of his machines Frank Reade, Jr., had long been at work upon what he intended should be a masterpiece.

He had long entertained a desire to take a trip into the Apache country of the southwest.

This new machine, therefore, was constructed with a view to safe traveling in that dangerous region.

For the enlightenment of the reader, let us give a brief description of it as completed.

For the body of the New Electric Caravan, for such Frank called it, he had selected sheets of fine rolled steel.

This was cleverly jointed and made water tight. The body of the Caravan was long and wagon shaped; with a high dasher from which projected a ram some four feet in length.

At intervals in the Caravan's body were small, circular windows like the dead-eyes of a ship.

Here were the lower compartments and electrical engine rooms of the machine. Above these compartments was a deck completely encircled by a guard rail.

Built up from the deck was a protective cage of the finest meshes of steel wire. At intervals there were small loop holes in the netting to allow of a rifle being fired from the interior.

Above the netting was yet another deck with a round turret which had its foundation in the main body of the Caravan.

This turret had loopholes and was designed as a means of wider view. Its interior was fitted up with rifle racks and stands of small arms, being a veritable arsenal. Above it waved a small flag.

And just forward near the dasher was the wheel-house, a small tower with plate glass windows. Here was the wheel which regulated the guiding apparatus of the wagon.

The wheels of the caravan were eight in number, there being four behind and four forward. They were very skillfully trucked, much like the wheels on a Pullman car.

But they were extremely light and banded with grooved rubber tires.

This with the cushion springs made the Caravan as easy riding a carriage as one could very well wish for.

Upon the turret there was placed a search-light of great power. At the rear of the Caravan there was mounted a very light but deadly dynamite gun, operated by electricity and the special invention of Frank Reade, Jr.

The interior of the Caravan was a revelation of elegance and comfort.

The furnishings were of the richest description. Of course the compartments were small, but they were many.

There was the main cabin, which was a combination of cabin and dining-saloon. Off from it were small bunks for sleeping.

Beyond were the cook room, the engine room, and a magazine for the storing of all explosive material used.

This had double plated steel shutters, and was bullet proof.

This is an inadequate description of the famous Electric Caravan.

Thousands of sight seers had been admitted within a few days to see the wonderful invention.

In Frank Reade, Jr.'s, employ there was a comical looking dorky, named Pomp, and a jovial Irishman named Barney O'Shea.

One was as black as a coal, and the other had the reddest of hair and as comical a mug as ever the Emerald Isle produced.

Barney and Pomp had been long in the employ of Frank Reade.

They were faithful, sharp and smart, and popular as well. Wherever the famous young inventor traveled the world over they accompanied him.

And half the success of his inventions depended upon the two—the Irishman and the negro. Moreover they were jolly company.

Barney was a joker of the most original kind, and could play the Irish fiddle with a master hand.

Pomp was a banjoist of a high order and brimful of plantation lore. The two made a hot team.

They were the best of friends and yet one was always engaged in playing pranks upon the other.

"Begorra, Mither Frank!" Barney had declared when the young inventor announced his intention of going into the Apache country.

"Yez cudn't take a thrip more to me loiking. Shure it's a foine Injun foighter I am."

"I have no doubt of it, Barney!" said Frank, seriously.

"Huh! don' yo' beliebe a wo'd ob dat, sah!" cried Pomp, derisively. "I done know all about dat chile. He am gwine to run an sabe dat lubly red scalp ob his, if he knows hisself."

Everybody laughed and Barney was furious.

"Bejabers, av they got that wool av yures they'd make a woollen blanket av it roight away!" he retorted.

No doubt the two jokers would have had a ruction then and there, had it not been for the interposition of Frank Reade, Jr.

He put a stop to it, and sent them about their business.

Thus affairs were and Frank had decided upon no definite course of action, when one day a man appeared at the machine works.

He was a tall, sharp featured man with a well knit form. His keen ferret eyes were a characteristic.

"Good-day!" he said pleasantly. "Is this Mr. Frank Reade, Jr.?"

"It is!" replied Frank.

"My card!"

Frank took the pasteboard. He saw the name upon it at once.

"ALVIN DEXTER,
 Detective, Boston."

"A detective!" he exclaimed in surprise. "What can I do for you?"

"You can do much!" replied the detective, quietly. "I trust that you will when I have told you my story."

"If I can help you subserve the ends of justice I am at your service!" replied Frank.

"You can!"

"Very good! Let me have your story!"

"Are we beyond listening ears?"

"Come with me!" said Frank.

He led the way into the private office. Both were seated; then the detective drew a photograph from his pocket.

He handed it to Frank.

"Did you ever see that man before?" he asked.

"Never," Frank admitted.

It was the portrait of a dark, repulsive man. He was a type of desperado.

"Ten years ago there occurred a terrible murder out in Connecticut," said the detective. "It was the Howells' murder. You remember that the old farmer and his wife were slaughtered by a farm hand named Danton Maxwell."

"The Howells' murder!" exclaimed Frank; "I remember it well."

"Good enough! That is the picture of Danton Maxwell."

"Well?"

"Now I have been on his track all these years. He escaped with ten thousand dollars of old Howells' money. Lately I have gained a clew as to his whereabouts."

"Ah! is that so?"

"Yes, I have heard that he is out in New Mexico herding cattle upon what is known as the Black Range. You may have heard of it?"

"Very good!" admitted Frank; "but in what manner can I help you?"

"There is no one else can help me so well. I understand that you are going down into the Apache country."

"I had thought of it."

"Also that you intend to travel thither in your new Electric Caravan."

"Yes."

"Good! Now the favor I have to ask of you in the interests of justice is to allow me to accompany you."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Frank. "I never take passengers."

"That settles it then. But I thought I would apply to you. However, I am going down there in quest of Maxwell, and maybe I will see you there."

Frank extended his hand.

"Young man," he cried, earnestly, "if I meet you down there I will certainly do all in my power to help you. But I cannot take you as a passenger from here. I would be slighting many whom I have refused, and that would not be right."

"I have gained my point," said the detective, arising. "It is your co-operation I want, not a free ride. Of course you will admit that the villain ought to be brought to justice?"

"Certainly, and I will help you do it."

"I thank you!"

Alvin Dexter, the detective, arose and went to the door.

"I will meet you in the land of the Greaser," he said. "Until then, Mr. Reade, I wish you good-day!"

Frank bowed, and the detective was gone. The young inventor ruminated some time over the matter.

He remembered the Howells murder very well. It was a fiendish and terrible deed. Surely it would be a great triumph to now, after ten years, bring the murderer to justice.

Frank, somewhat excited, touched a bell and Pomp appeared.

"Pomp," said the young inventor, brusquely, "I want you to see that the caravan is all ready to start to-morrow. Have it put aboard a car in sections and billed to Santa Fe. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sah!" replied the darky, bobbing his head. "I'se gwine to do jes' wha' yo' say, sah!"

Then he vanished. Frank Reade, Jr., lost no time in preparation.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE APACHE COUNTRY.

The world which had its eyes upon the action of the famous young inventor little dreamed that he had any other mission to New Mexico than that of pleasure seeking and a little wild adventure.

Had it been known that he was to endeavor to bring back the celebrated murderer Danton Maxwell a genuine sensation would have been created.

Preparations for the start were quickly made.

Barney and Pomp were genuine hustlers when they chose to be. In a very short time the caravan was all ready to start.

It was billed to Santa Fe as Frank had directed.

Then the young inventor with Barney and Pomp entered a special car. Another special carried their effects and equipments.

A great crowd of friends saw them off at the depot at Readestown. Soon they were en route for New Mexico.

Nothing of an exciting nature occurred during the long car ride. In good time Santa Fe was reached.

Then the work of putting the caravan together was begun.

But Barney and Pomp understood this to a dot, and it was not long before the machine was in working order.

Then the equipments were placed aboard and all was in readiness for the start.

Of course the proceeding had attracted some attention. Somehow the rumor got abroad in Santa Fe that Frank Reade, Jr., and a new invention were in the place.

A large crowd collected and there was much excitement. But Frank did not heed this, and as soon as the provisions and equipments had been put aboard he climbed aboard with Barney and Pomp and the caravan started.

The landing place was in the outskirts of Santa Fe, so the machine was soon in the country. Straight to the southward the course was made.

Various hamlets, ranches and water holes were passed, until one day the caravan after a long hard run over sandy plains came to the banks of a rapid flowing river.

"The Rio Pecos!" declared Frank. "Beyond that are the Staked Plains, and to the southward the Apache country!"

"Golly!" cried Pomp. "Am we gwine fo' to fin' de Injuns afore long, Marse Frank?"

"Bejabsers I'm afther thinkin' we've found thim already!" cried Barney, excitedly. "Wud yez luk at that?"

The Celt pointed to the southward.

There was a little belt of timber which extended to the river's banks a mile below. From this a band of horsemen had appeared.

They were coming like a flying cloud toward the Caravan.

It needed but a glance to see by their long lances and flowing plumes that they were Indians.

That they were Apaches was likely, though it was possible that they were Navajoes. If the former, they were hostile.

Frank had brought the Caravan to a halt by the river bank.

The stream here was shallow enough to ford. But Frank did not attempt to cross as yet.

He wanted to get a near view of the Apaches and see what they intended doing. On they came like a whirlwind.

Not two minutes elapsed before they were within hailing distance.

Then they reined in their ponies.

Like statues they sat upon their diminutive steeds, regarding the Caravan with evident astonishment.

A hard-looking set they were. Painted and bedecked with feathers and half naked, they were genuine types of the barbarian.

For some while they sat motionless, regarding the new and curious "prairie schooner," for such they evidently regarded it. Then they wheeled, and with wild yells began riding in a circle about the Caravan, discharging their arrows and rifles at the machine.

Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp watched them curiously.

"Begorra, they must loike the fun av that!" cried Barney finally, in disgust. "Phwat do yez say, Misther Frank, av we give them a bit av a shot?"

"Wait awhile!" said Frank. "Let us see what they will do."

Finding that their bullets and arrows had little effect upon the strange "wagon," the savages once more gathered in a cluster some two hundred yards away.

The crew of the Caravan could easily have picked off a number of them had they so desired.

But Frank would not let Barney and Pomp fire upon them. And now the treacherous crafty nature of the savage showed itself.

They seemed to hold a conference for some moments.

Then one of their number dropped from his pony, and, with hands uplifted, approached the caravan.

This was in token of amity, and Frank decided to grant the truce. He stepped out of the cage, while Barney and Pomp kept their rifles upon the advancing red man to make sure of guarding against treachery.

The savage advanced until within fifty feet of the machine.

Then Frank said:

"Well, red man, what do you want?"

The Apache, who was a hideous looking chap, expanded his ugly mouth in an artificial grin.

"Me heap friend pale face," he declared. "Come see pale face in his big wagon."

Frank smiled at this.

"Evidently that red-skin thinks we are fools," he reflected. "I'll undeceive him."

Then aloud he said:

"I don't believe you will, Indian. You showed how friendly you were by firing upon us a few moments ago."

The Apache only affected a deeper grin, and said:

"Dat only way Apache man say howdy. Welcome. No fear. We friends."

"Then you'll go on about your business and leave us alone!" said Frank, pointedly.

"Red man want to come in white man's wagon. Heap fire water. Be friends."

"No, you don't, you red scoundrel!" replied Frank, sharply.

"That game won't work. All we ask of you is to go on about your own affairs."

"No make friends wif red man?" asked the savage, half angrily.

"I don't care to," replied Frank, with a repellant gesture. "Go away."

Whereupon the professed red friend burst forth with a volley of expletives such as Frank had never heard the likes of even from the lips of a white man.

Then the truce bearer returned to his waiting companions and reported.

They were evidently not well pleased with this. They began yelling fiendishly and brandishing their weapons.

Then once more they began circling their horses about the Caravan, firing at the machine the while.

Still Frank would not allow Barney and Pomp to retaliate.

"We do not want to take human life if we can help it!" he declared, "but if we find it necessary then we will teach them a lesson they will not soon forget."

"Begorra, I'd loike wan good thry at the varmints," said Barney, eagerly.

Frank now started the machine toward the river with the purpose of fording. The bottom was clear and sandy and the water shallow so that this was quite possible.

The Apaches seeing this purpose at once began to draw nearer the Caravan yelling the while.

Emboldened by the fact that they were not fired upon they came quite near. Just as the Caravan made the bank of the river the precipitate attack came.

The savages rushed their ponies up close to the Caravan and throwing themselves off tried to gain the deck.

But Frank Reade, Jr. was prepared for them.

He saw that there was no alternative but to kill a few of them and he shouted to Barney and Pomp.

"Give it to them! Don't spare one and make every shot count."

The two jokers needed no second bidding.

Their hatred of the Indian was instinctive, and they at once sprang to the loopholes in the cage with shouts of joy.

"We'll gib it to 'em, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp. "Oh, yes, yo' jes' bet yo' life we will."

"Whurroo!" yelled Barney. "Bad luck to the divils, an' here goes fer phwat we're worth. Have at yez."

Just as fast as the two could work their repeaters they fired upon the savages through the loopholes in the cage. The fire proved most deadly.

The Apaches could not stand before so hot a fire.

Some of them had really gained the deck of the Caravan, but they dropped almost instantly with rifle balls in their bodies given with unerring aim.

Beneath such a deadly fire the red foe were driven back.

The Indian is a poor fighter in the open ground. The moment that they found their attack stubbornly contested they broke and fled.

To a good safe distance also. Not until they were far beyond rifle range did they halt. Ten of their number were left dead behind.

While not a scratch had been received by those on board the Caravan.

Barney and Pomp cheered lustily.

Frank sent the Caravan ahead now, feeling quite safe. The Apaches had retired and did not seem disposed to renew the contest.

Through the river went the Caravan. Once upon the other side there was a genuine feeling of security.

The savages watched the crossing at a respectable distance.

They did not attempt to interfere. By the light of day they seemed a trifle afraid.

But they were not idle. Some of them began to deploy down the river and cross as if with the intention of heading off the Caravan.

Frank, however, did not fear that they would succeed in this.

After crossing the river he sent the Caravan booming away over the plain.

The ponies of the Apaches could not hope to travel with the Caravan, so they were soon left far behind.

On over the plain boomed the Caravan at a forty mile gait.

It was smooth going and good time could be made. The plain was level and almost floor-like.

Miles were covered, and suddenly Barney, who was forward with a powerful glass, shouted:

"Begorra, Misher Frank, wud yez cum here!"

Frank at once hastened to the Celt's side.

"What is the matter, Barney?" he asked.

"Jist luk fer yersilf, sor. Shure I don't know whether it's more Injuns or not!"

Frank took the glass and studied a distant dark line on the horizon. At first he fancied they might be buffalo, but the truth flashed across his mind.

"It is a round-up!" he ejaculated. "This is a great cattle range, and we are now in the land of the cowboys!"

"Whurroo!" cried Barney, joyfully. "Shure that's the finest av news!"

"We will run down there and pay our respects to the herders," declared Frank.

The Caravan's course was instantly changed, and it ran rapidly now toward the distant herd of cattle.

It was seen now by the surface of the plain that cattle had grazed here. This was *prima facie* evidence that they were at last in the land of the cowboys.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE BLACK RANCH.

To say that Gen. Vaile and his companions were astonished by the appearance of the Caravan would be a mild statement of the facts. It came down toward them at thundering speed.

In the bow stood Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney. Pomp was in the wheel-house.

"What the deuce is coming?" gasped the general. "What d'ye call it, Reed?"

Haven Reed was amazed.

"Upon my word, that beats me!" he exclaimed. "It's a locomotive off the track."

The cowboys straightened up and unhung their lariats as if they would make a cast at the runaway monster.

But the Caravan now suddenly slackened speed.

Brakes were applied and she rounded to, so to speak, and came to a stop not twenty yards distant.

Frank Reade, Jr., lifted his cap politely and shouted:

"Good-day to you, gentlemen! I am pleased to meet you."

"Ye-es!" ejaculated the astonished general. "So are we. But—who the deuce are you?"

All on board the Caravan laughed at the earnestness of the general. Then Frank made reply:

"I am Frank Reade, Jr., and these gentlemen are Barney and Pomp, my assistants. Whom have I the honor of addressing?"

"Gen. Vaile, at your service, and this is Haven Reed, manager of my ranch."

"I am happy to meet Gen. Vaile!"

"It is mutual! But tell me, what kind of a machine have you there that runs without the need of rails?"

"This is the Electric Caravan!" replied Frank. "An invention of mine!"

"Well, I'll be shot! I never saw anything like it before!" cried the general.

"There are many who say that same thing," said Frank, "but I can assure I find the Caravan a safe and effective way of traveling in these wild regions!"

"I should think you might!" agreed the general. "Is that cage bullet proof?"

"It is, but I should be pleased to welcome you aboard."

"Thank you!"

Frank leaped down from the deck of the Caravan. The general dismounted. Then they advanced and shook hands warmly.

Each looked into the eyes of the other, and from that moment they were friends.

The general and Reed went aboard the Caravan.

Frank showed them the mechanism of the machine, and they were deeply interested.

"Wonderful!" cried the general, enthusiastically. "Truly, Mr. Reade, you are a famous inventor."

"I enjoy my inventions," said Frank, modestly; "but if you will tarry aboard, my negro cook will prepare you a pleasant meal."

"A thousand thanks," replied the general warmly, "but my ranch is only ten miles distant. I insist upon your going thither with me." So it was decided that the party should go on to the ranch and pass the night.

Frank was not loth to do this, and Barney and Pomp were delighted.

They saw a good chance for sport and a good feast. So the start was made.

Gen. Vaile and Haven Reed accepted Frank's invitation to ride on the Caravan.

Their horses were taken charge of by the cowboys, who rode on behind. But the Caravan soon left them far behind.

In a short while Black River Ranch came in sight.

Then the Caravan bowled into the ranch yard.

On the way thither the general had told Frank of the changed brands and the rascality of Max Dane.

"I am not sure but that the villain will have the hardihood to attack this ranch!" he declared. "If he does, then there will be a terrible fight."

"I trust you may beat him off," said Frank, warmly. "If I am in the vicinity I shall certainly help you. But—"

"What?"

"Have you seen a detective down this way by the name of Alvin Dexter?"

"A detective?"

"Yes."

"No."

The general looked inquisitive, and Frank said:

"I think he is in pursuit of a noted murderer by name Danton Maxwell."

"Danton Maxwell!" mused the general. "The name sounds familiar. Yet I cannot say that I have ever met anybody by that name hereabouts."

"I fear Mr. Dexter will find that he has a harder task to perform than he dreams of," said Frank, "however, that is his business!"

"Now, Mr. Reade!" said the hospitable general, as they stepped down from the Caravan, "let me show you over my ranch. Then we will go in to supper as I see the hour is near!"

This was true.

The sun was just gilding the western sky with rare gorgeousness. Frank accepted the general's kind invitation.

There was nothing suited the ranch owner better than to pilot one over his place and show them the stock.

While he was doing this, however, Barney and Pomp proceeded to have a little fun on their own account.

They made things ship-shape aboard the Caravan.

Meanwhile the three cowboys Jerry Juke, Snapper Jake and Vil Decatur had been making a social acquaintance with them.

All fraternized happily, and it was proposed by the cowboys that the party retire to a cow shed near and beguile a short while at the fascinating game of penuchle.

Barney and Pomp were willing.

They were professed greenhorns, and the cowboys winked and chuckled at the prospect of a good haul.

But pinochle was too flat for such sportive minds, and it was voted down promptly in favor of draw-poker.

Of this simple game Barney and Pomp professed to know nothing yet they were not loath to enter.

Jerry Juke dealt the cards.

"Ante all!" he said tersely.

This was done. Then Snapper Jake threw down his hand and Vil Decatur called for two cards.

"He am tryin' fo' a full house," thought the astute Pomp, "he am jes' got free o' a kind. I done flink I'll stay."

Barney was out of it. It lay now between Pomp and Jerry Juke. There was a moment of silence.

Then Pomp very cautiously took up a chip and placed it on the pile. Jerry grinned, and slapped down a whole fistfull of chips.

"I'll yo' ye fifty to better," he cried. "Now les' see yer, sand negger."

There was the faintest suspicion of a smile about the corners of Pomp's mouth. But he feigned doubt.

"Don' know 'bout dat, mah friend!" he said, cautiously. "Hab yo' got a straight flush or am yo' jes' bluffing?"

"I've got enough tew beat yew, nigger!" said the cowboy.

"Well, I 'spose I might see you one bettah!" said Pomp, slowly.

The cowboy looked keenly at the darky.

"Air yew bluffing?"

"Hain't nuffin' to say!"

"I'll raise yew ten!"

"Jes' one bettah!"

"I'll go it and call!"

The others had been interested spectators. They bent forward now eagerly as the two players threw down their hands.

The result was curious.

Jerry Jake showed three aces. Certainly it was a good hand. But Pomp very quietly laid four nines upon the table.

"Who am de winner?" he asked, innocently.

All roared at this but Jerry Juke, who looked disgusted.

"Good fer yew, nigger!" shouted Snapper Jake, pounding Pomp on the back. "Yew air all right—an' I'll risk yew."

Once more the game went on. This time Snapper Jake won a small pot. The game progressed merrily for some time.

Then, as honors were about even, the festive cowboys thought they would have some fun.

They winked at each other, and Vil Decatur turned and said:

"I'll wager my buckskin broncho on this hand agin your money. What dew ye say?"

"I'se jes' gwine to take dat, sah!" cried Pomp.

"Dew ye mean it?"

"Ob co'se I does!"

"Put up the cards!"

They were dealt, and as good luck had it, Pomp got a full house of aces and kings. He stood ready to back it with all he had.

Decatur's hand was three jacks, and he bet boldly.

The result was that Pomp won easy. The negro was delighted.

"Golly!" he exclaimed, "I jes' want fo' to take one look at dat lily hoss!"

"Good fer yew, nigger!" cried Jake, and then all the cowboys began to congratulate him.

Decatur appeared to be much broken up, and tried to get Pomp to release him. But the darky would not.

"Well," said Decatur, "I'll make a race with ye fer him? He's the fastest mustang on the ranch, but I kin take old Spotted Joe an' beat ye!"

"I'll do dat, frien'!" cried Pomp, whose racing blood was up.

Pomp had once been a very successful jockey, and there was no doubt in his mind but that he could open the eyes of the cowboys.

So off to the corral they went. It was just at dusk, but there was yet time enough for a race.

Decatur lassoed and led forth the very prettiest mustang of the lot. Pomp was delighted.

"Ye've got the king pin hoss on the range, nigger!" cried Snapper Jake. "Now les' see ye ride him."

"Huh! jes' yo' len' me a saddle an' I'll show yo'!" declared Pomp.

Decatur brought out a saddle and it was placed on the mustang's back, he making little or no resistance.

Then Pomp pulled his cap over his ears and advanced to mount.

The mustang stood docile enough while Pomp mounted.

But when the darky raised the reins and slapped the animal's neck there was an immediate circus.

The principal actors were Pomp and the mustang. The question was one of mastery, and it required an area of a mile square to settle it.

The mustang made a leap in the air, and began a system of gyrations which made Pomp dizzy.

The darky, however, was a good rider and hung on. He saw the point of the joke at once, and grimly resolved to turn it on the laughing and shrieking cowboys.

"Hang on, nigger!"

"Don't drop off!"

"Lay him out!"

These and other yells were given, and Pomp heeded them well. Round and round the corral went the darky and the mustang in the mad struggle for mastery.

So long as the mustang persevered in this line of procedure Pomp was all right. But presently he changed his tactics.

CHAPTER V.

FRANK PROPOSES TO DEFEND THE RANCH.

THAT mustang was an expert in the art of bucking. Thus far he had tried it in every fashion upon Pomp.

But in vain!

The darky still clung. Now, however, the mustang tried a change of programme much to Pomp's sorrow.

Turning suddenly after coming to a stop, the mustang reached around and instantly gripped Pomp's toe, stirrup and all in its teeth.

The hold was a good one, and the darky gave a spasmodic yell of pain. The mustang went around lightning-like in a circle and the darky losing his balance went off.

The fall broke the vicious animal's hold upon his foot and the mustang galloped away with a shrill neigh of triumph.

The cowboys yelled with delight as Pomp arose and came hobbling toward them.

"What'll yew take fer yer pony, nigger?"

"Ain't he a buck jumper?"

"Yew are a dandy rider!"

These were the exclamations which Pomp had to face. The darky was very angry and sullen.

"Dat am a'right!" he growled, "but I jes' bet yo' de beer fo' de crowd dat none ob you uns can stay on dat hoss's back so long as I did."

"I'll take yew, nigger!" cried Snapper Jake. "Put up yer cash."

"Mah wo'd am good!"

"All right! I'll take yer word fer it."

The pony was lassoed once more, and Snapper Jake mounted. To Pomp's amazement the cowhoy had no trouble with the mustang at all.

Pomp was now the laughing stock of the crowd. But he was too disgusted to appreciate the joke.

"Huh!" he growled. "I don' flink nobody kin ride a trick pony. I was jes' fooled dat was all."

Darkness now began to settle down thick and fast.

Every moment cowboys began to ride in from distant points, until fully half a score were on hand.

All of them brought a thrilling report.

It was rumored at the settlement below on Black River that Black Max had sworn the most dire vengeance upon Gen. Vaile.

The general heard this report not without some concern.

He at once gave orders for the place to be carefully guarded, and that every man should have his pistols ready at hand that night.

"This may not be very pleasant for you, Mr. Reade," he said to Frank. "I have no doubt you would rather be out of it."

"On the contrary," said Frank, "I shall be pleased to be right in it, and I think we can give these rascals a good siege."

"You don't say that you mean to help us?"

"Certainly."

The general wrung Frank's hand warmly.

"I shall never forget you," he said.

Perhaps the most deeply alarmed person on the place was the general's daughter, Carlotta Vaile.

She was a beautiful and accomplished girl, and the idol of her father's heart.

The home of the Vailes was in St. Louis, but Carlotta had begged permission to accompany her father out upon his ranch.

She was the only one of her sex in a wide region about, and had only been enabled to reach the ranch by a long horseback ride, which few women could have made.

While at the ranch she had met handsome, dashing Haven Reed and the two had fallen in love as first sight.

This was one reason why Carlotta was very willing to remain upon the ranch, and then she also enjoyed the wild freedom of the plains.

Gen. Vaile would not have worried so much over any attack of the villain Dane had it not been for the presence of Carlotta.

The evening, however, was very pleasantly spent in the parlor of the ranch.

Miss Carlotta sang and played her guitar to the company.

Then Barney and Pomp contributed in their inimitable way with the fiddle and the banjo.

This immensely pleased the cowboys and Barney and Pomp were favorites from that on.

But at the hour of ten and just as the party was breaking up some exciting incidents occurred.

There was the clatter of horses' hoofs, and a cowboy came riding madly into the yard.

He almost tumbled from his horse and staggered up the piazza steps. It was seen then that his face was streaming with blood.

"Broncho Bill!" cried Haven Reed, excitedly. "What is the matter with you?"

"The devils are coming!" gasped the exhausted cowboy. "They nigh finished me down here by the Forks!"

"Who is coming?" cried Gen. Vaile.

"Why, that pizen varmint, Black Max. He's got all of a hundred or more Greasers and cut-throats from Broken Bar. They're all coming up hyar to wipe out this ranch!"

Gen. Vaile turned deadly pale and reeled back.

"My God!" he gasped, "this is awful!"

Then he clutched Haven Reed's arm.

"Reed, my boy," he said, huskily, "I'm going to put great trust in you."

"You can trust me to the death!" said Haven in a voice of steel.

"I want you to saddle the two best horses on the range. Take Carlotta and ride—ride until you reach Fort Myers. Leave her there and bring back troops."

"I will."

Haven Reed started for the door. But Frank Reade, Jr., stood before him.

"Wait," said the young inventor, calmly. "Don't do that!"

"Why?" exclaimed Gen. Vaile.

"Because it is needless. If you will only trust in me, I will defend your ranch against a thousand of them!"

"You——" exclaimed Gen. Vaile, brokenly. "How will you do it?"

"You shall ask no questions, but leave it all to me!"

Before more could be said, however, there was a commotion outside.

Then in came a couple of cowboys, dragging a man between them, whose arms were pinned to his side by a lariat.

"We've got one on 'em, general!" cried one of the cowboys. "We run him down out on the plain yonder!"

"Confound it all, I tell you you've made a mistake!" expostulated the captive. "I'm not the man you think I am!"

Then, the speaker's face being exposed in the light, Frank recognized him.

"Alvin Dexter, the detective!" he gasped.

"Frank Reade, Jr.!" cried the detective, joyfully. "I told you we should meet!"

Frank turned to the detective's captors.

"I will vouch for this man!" he said, "he is a friend."

Explanations followed and apologies were in order. Then Dexter told of his adventures since leaving home.

"I left Santa Fe a week ago!" he declared. "I have ridden night and day and have just come from Broken Bar, a rough settlement below here."

"What!" cried Gen. Vaile, "then you must have heard of an uprising there?"

"Yes!" replied the detective. "And I was on my way here to warn you!"

"Indeed!"

"A certain desperado named Black Max is coming with a gang of cut-throats to burn your ranch."

"So we have news!" said Frank Reade, Jr.

"Then you are prepared for him?"

"We shall be!"

"Thank Heaven for that. Do you know I think I recognized in him my man!"

Frank Reade, Jr., was astounded.

"You don't mean it?" he cried. "Not Danton Maxwell, the murderer?"

"Yes, I believe that he and Black Max are the same."

"Then we must capture him!" cried Frank excitedly. "Dexter, I shall help you all in my power."

"Thank you, Mr. Reade," said the detective, gratefully. "With your help I am sure of success!"

The great question now was how to receive the attack of the foe.

Meanwhile a new rumor had reached the ranch.

This was that the Apache band of Long Lance were in collusion with Black Max, and were also coming to the attack.

If this was the case a tremendous force would be launched against the few defenders of Black River Ranch.

"Don't you really think, Mr. Reade," asked Gen. Vaile, "that we had better send Carlotta to Fort Myers?"

"General," said Frank, quietly, "have no fears. I can defeat a force twice as large."

"I depend on you?"

"You may."

It was reckoned that the attacking party would reach the ranch shortly after midnight.

Frank Reade, Jr., who had undertaken the defense of the ranch, now began to formulate his plans accordingly.

The Caravan was placed at the gate of the stockade with the electric gun trained to bear upon the prairie in front.

Then Frank took a great coil of wire and went out upon the prairie.

With the help of Barney and Pompe he rapidly uncoiled it and made several circuits of the stockade, about a hundred yards distant from it.

This wire was connected with the powerful dynamos, and a terrific current sent through it.

Then every fighting man in the ranch was stationed upon the stockade. With the search-light Frank could at will reveal any point around the stockade for a mile or more.

Thus prepared, the young inventor said to Gen. Vaile:

"If they whip us now they must have some powerful artillery. And if they don't dismount my electric gun at once, they can't even do it with that."

Gen. Vaile was now more confident, and said:

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Reade! I hope your plans will not miscarry!"

"Have no fear of that," said Frank, "but if your daughter you fear for let her come aboard the caravan. We can all escape in that, anyway, for they have not horses fleet enough to catch us."

"Indeed, I will avail myself of that offer, Mr. Reade. A stray bullet you know might enter the stockade."

"You are quite right, Gen. Vaile."

So Carlotta went aboard the Caravan. She was certainly safe there. All preparations had been made for the attack of the foe. But midnight came and passed. Still he did not come.

"Are our advices reliable?" asked Haven Reed, in somewhat of doubt.

"Mr. Alvin Dexter reported it so," replied Frank, Reade, Jr. "He came direct from Broken Bar."

"Certainly; the report was current there," declared the detective. "Indeed, there was much excitement over it."

"I think there is no doubt of the villain's intentions," declared Gen. Vaile.

But yet the attacking party did not appear. What did it mean?

CHAPTER VI.

AN ELECTRICAL SURPRISE.

HAD there been a picket, or an outpost, however, it would have been speedily discovered that the foe were advancing to the attack.

But their scheme was, Indian like, to effect a surprise.

Their ponies were corralled some miles below, and the band of white men and Apaches, full three hundred strong, were creeping through the tall prairie grass toward the doomed ranch.

The first intimation of this was received in a strange way.

Suddenly Frank heard the dynamos click. There was a shock, a brief flash of light out on the prairie, and a terrible agonized yell.

Instantly the young inventor was upon his feet.

"Hurrah!" he cried, "there is the advance guard, and the first victim!"

Instantly all was excitement in the stockade.

The cowboys all rushed to their posts half expecting the foe to pounce right down upon them.

But they did not.

The wires so skilfully laid by Frank Reade, Jr. were doing their work.

The young inventor had at once sprung to the searchlight and sent its rays out on the prairie.

The wires could not be seen as they were low on the ground, but the forms of the assailants could be identified plainly.

Seeing that they were discovered all reserve was thrown off and they came to the attack furiously.

In a body they sprung up from the grass and rushed toward the stockade.

But they did not reach it.

Instead they struck the deadly electric wires and the result was terrible for them.

By the score they were piled in an inextricable heap. Some of them received a death stroke, but others not coming in direct contact with the wire were shocked into insensibility.

While, with every contact with the wire lightning flashes seemed to leap and play along the ground.

Of course such a mysterious and astounding reception as that had a demoralizing effect upon the attacking force.

Especially the Indians were terrified by the curious lightning flashes.

To them they had a supernatural meaning, and this was enough. They beat a hasty and unceremonious retreat.

The Greasers and other desperadoes of Dane's command had never seen an exhibition of electrical forces before.

It was therefore natural that they should be also impressed with doubt and terror.

To them it seemed as if mines were being exploded beneath them, with the exception that there was no report.

Several charges were made, but each time the electric wires threw them into confusion.

The result was that they were obliged to beat a dismayed retreat. Out upon the darkened prairie they rushed pell mell.

But they gave vent to their feelings in wild and demoniac yells. The cowboys and Gen. Vaile were elated as well as wonderstruck.

The general came rushing aboard the Caravan wildly excited.

"Mr. Reade, you have done it!" he cried. "Bravo! it is wonderful!"

"I told you that we would make it lively for them!" said Frank with a smile.

"And you have done so. Your electric wires did it."

"The best thing they can do!" said Frank, grimly. "Is to make tracks from this vicinity. I can annihilate ten times their number!"

"Indeed, I believe you!"

The cowboys were riding their horses madly about the ranch yard, shouting defiance to their foes out on the prairie, and firing their pistols in the air.

It was not long before Dane's gang recovered from their repulse.

They gathered upon a little rise of the prairie and returned the yells of the cowboys. It was plain that they had not given up the contest.

"I really believe they mean to attack us again," said Haven Reed.

"You may depend upon it!" declared Frank, "that is their intention."

"Had we not better get ready to receive them?"

"Wait a while!"

Frank kept the searchlight full upon the group of desperadoes.

This plainly did not please them, for it was most dazzling, and its nature they could not comprehend.

They kept up a rattling fire all the while. This was not without ef-

fect either, for two of the cowboys who recklessly exposed themselves were badly wounded.

The desperadoes now seemed to adopt new tactics.

They deployed in single lines until the ranch was completely surrounded.

Then the tramp of horses' feet was heard. The truth was apparent. They had brought up the horses, and were about to make a mounted attack.

"Well, they have good pluck," muttered Frank Reade, Jr., "but I think we can give them enough this time."

Round and round the ranch the attacking party now rode. The prairie seemed alive with them.

The Apaches rode their ponies in their usual way, yelling like fiends. Nearer they drew their line to the ranch. Frank knew that they must soon strike the wires.

The young inventor followed them with the search-light closely. Suddenly the crash came.

One of the Apache ponies came in contact with a wire.

There was a terrific flash, and horse and rider were tumbled in a heap.

But Frank Reade, Jr., heard a dismaying sound.

This was the rattling buzz of the dynamos.

At once he sprang into the engine-room and saw the truth.

The wire had been severed by the collision with the Indian pony, and the circuit was broken.

Had the attacking force known this at the moment, they might have made a mad attack upon the ranch, and perhaps have carried it.

Fortunately they delayed their attack, little aware of the advantage they held.

As soon as he saw that the circuit was broken, Frank knew at once the uselessness of the electric wires.

He knew that a different mode of defense must be adopted, and that at once.

He shouted to Barney and Pomp, and then sprang to the breech of the electric gun.

Quick as a flash Frank placed a projectile in the breech.

Then Barney in the pilot-house pressed the motive lever, and the Caravan ran out of the ranch yard.

Out upon the prairie it ran, and Pomp swept the circle with the electric light. Just where the largest crowd of the foe were, Barney swung the head of the Caravan about.

Frank took lightning-like aim and then pressed the electric key.

The result was thrilling.

There was a slight recoil, a hissing of air, and then the dynamite projectile was launched at the foe.

It struck the ground right in the midst of a score of Apaches.

There was a terrific, thunderous roar and an earthquake-like shock. Then a mighty blaze of light, and the bodies of Indians and tons of earth and stone were seen to rise in the air.

Falling, the debris formed a mound full ten feet high, a literal cavern being made in the ground.

Round swept the Caravan.

Frank thrust another dynamite bomb in the breech of the gun. Once again he drew aim and pressed the electric key.

Another explosion followed and again a score of Apaches met their fate.

The rest of the attacking band had now paused aghast at the deadly work of the destroying invention.

They had never seen anything like it before and were wholly at a loss to understand it.

They could face a battery of Uncle Sam's guns but to attempt to stand before this awful destroyer was too much.

There was plainly power enough in the deadly gun to destroy them all. Satisfied of this, a hasty and most disorderly retreat was made.

Frank sent the Caravan after them.

Wherever a good shot could be made with the dynamite gun, it was made. Dozens of the Apaches were thus slaughtered.

But the white desperadoes seemed to bear charmed lives. They got beyond range and disappeared.

For some miles Frank pursued the foe. Then he returned to the ranch.

The battle was over.

The defenders of the ranch were victors. Gen. Vaile was overjoyed.

He wrung Frank's hand earnestly and cried:

"But for you we should certainly have all been slaughtered and the ranch burned!" he declared. "It is a debt I can never fully repay, but I shall never forget."

"Indeed," said Frank, warmly. "Do not think of that. I am only too glad to help you."

Beautiful Carlotta Vaile was exuberant in her joy and gratitude.

She expressed her warmest thanks to Frank. Then there followed a spell of merrymaking at the ranch.

It was in the early hours before this had ended.

Daylight was at hand. However, Gen. Vaile's fears were not over.

He had called every cowboy on the range to duty, and ordered them all armed to the teeth.

"We have got to ride the range over," he declared, "the villains have been baffled in their attempt to destroy the ranch, but they will attempt to atone for that by killing all of my cattle."

"Do you mean that?" exclaimed Frank in surprise.

"Certainly I do!"

"Then stay! Leave your men here to defend the ranch. I will go out with you in the Caravan to patrol the range!"

Gen. Vaile was overjoyed.

"Do you mean that?" he cried.

"Certainly I do!"

"How shall I ever repay you?"

"You need not think of that. I ask for no better diversion than the bringing of these rascals to justice!"

So the affair was settled.

The cowboys in charge of Haven Reed were to be left in defense of the ranch. Gen. Vaile gladly went aboard the Caravan.

It was not believed that the villains would dare attack the ranch again at once. They would not know but that the Caravan yet hovered in the yard.

"I hope we may run down that villain, Danton Maxwell!" declared Dexter, the detective. "I would like to take him back in manacles to the East."

"Perhaps we can run him down this time!" said Frank, confidently. "One thing is sure, if we can sight him we will catch him, and you may depend upon it."

CHAPTER VII.

THE STAMPEDE.

THE Caravan at once started out across the range.

Soon the ranch was left out of sight on the horizon, and the Black River's gleaming waters could be seen ahead.

Back of this were the mountains.

Here in a sort of coulee there was a round-up of several thousand cattle. They were in charge of half a dozen experienced cowboys.

It was this particular herd that the general was anxious about.

He knew that the villains would be apt to strike this one first as it was the most valuable.

If they could stampede and run it into the mountains they could hold the cattle there forever.

If not they could destroy, which would mean a heavy loss to the ranch owner.

So it can be understood why Gen. Vaile was so anxious. The Caravan now rapidly drew nearer to the coulee.

This was a sink or depression in the plain with precipitous sides. There was a narrow entrance to it from the lower plain, and it furnished an excellent place for the round-up, for the cattle, once in the spacious coulee, could be held as securely as in a corral, and by half the number of men.

It could not be seen what was going on in the coulee until close upon it.

Then all distinctly heard the sound of fire-arms.

"They have attacked our men!" cried the general, excitedly.

"Look! on my word there goes the stampede!"

The rumbling sound of hoofs like distant thunder was heard. Then across the bottom lands the vast herd of long horns was seen galloping.

While in their rear were a hundred mounted and yelling Apaches. It was plainly the purpose of the Indians to stampede the herd into the mountains.

Once there they could be driven into remote valleys, from whence an army would be required to rescue them.

It was necessary at once to take the most active measures to prevent this contingency.

Frank Reade, Jr., realized this just as well as Gen. Vaile.

He sent the Caravan ahead at full speed.

"Bejabers, I'd loike a shot at the omadhouns!" cried Barney, who was forward with his rifle.

"Yo' kin jes' bet I would, too!" said Pomp, who was by his side.

Dexter and Gen. Vaile also held rifles in readiness for use. But they were not yet in range.

Now the machine ran down a slope, and was upon the lower plain.

A moment more, and the entrance to the coulee was reached.

Here a fearful sight was revealed.

The half dozen cowboys here encamped, had made a game fight for their lives and to save the herd.

There, upon the ground, lay their mangled bodies devoid of scalps. It was a fearful sight.

"Revenge!" gritted Gen. Vaile. "We should not spare one of the miserable dogs!"

"Now will we!" said Alvin Dexter. "Death to the whole gang!"

Leaving the coulee, the Caravan now followed the Apaches.

The redskins were driving the cattle straight for the river.

At this point it was easily forded. But cattle, no matter how great the stampede are always halted by water.

Thirst is never disregarded by a dumb beast. Instinctively the leaders halted in midstream.

There was a struggling mass of the cattle in the stream and the Apaches in vain tried to hasten the crossing.

This was a fortunate delay.

The Caravan now had approached within a quarter of a mile of the river. But the ground here was boggy and treacherous and progress was slow.

Frank hardly dared to use the electric gun for fear the bolt might overthrow and kill many valuable cattle.

But Barney and Pomp, Dexter and Gen. Vaile opened fire.

The rifle bullets did good work too.

The Apaches returned the fire but their bullets rattled harmlessly off the shell of the Caravan.

No harm was done and every moment the white men were getting nearer. The Apache warriors were waxing alarmed.

But now the cattle had taken a fresh start and were across the river.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the detective. "It looks as if we would lose them yet!"

"No, no!" cried Gen. Vaile, "that must not be!"

The boggy ground having been crossed Frank sent the Caravan ahead at great speed now.

In a moment they were at the water's edge.

The savages were upon the opposite bank, and with loud yells of triumph were rushing the cattle toward a high walled pass.

Frank sent the Caravan into the shallow river. When about half way across, however, a startling mishap occurred.

The Caravan suddenly came to a halt.

The utmost of the electric current could not move it forward or even backward. Dismay was in every face.

"What can be the matter?"

"Has something broken?"

"No," said Frank. "Nothing has broken. It is an obstruction."

"An obstruction!" exclaimed Gen. Vaile, in surprise. "What manner of one?"

"Probably a rock," replied Frank. "We'll soon get around that."

"We will be too late!" said Gen. Vaile, hopelessly.

"Do you think so?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Easy enough! If they get the cattle into that canyon it will be the last we shall see of them."

"Why not pursue them still?"

"That will be impossible. This vehicle cannot make its way through that pass owing to the rocky formation. We could not cope with such odds on foot."

Truly it was a hopeless outlook.

But Frank Reade, Jr. was not disposed to abandon hope. That was never his way.

"At least we will make an effort to save your cattle, Gen. Vaile," he said. "Come, Pomp, you are a water bird!"

"Yas, sah!" replied the darky, promptly. "Wha'ebber yer want, sah?"

"Just pull off your clothes, dive down there and see what's the matter."

"A'right, sah!"

The darky needed no second bidding.

In an instant he had thrown off his clothing and then went over the rail. Barney wanted to follow him but Frank would not allow him.

"Pomp will do it alone," he said. "We will soon find out the trouble."

The darky dived several times.

Finally he came up on the opposite side of the Caravan and cried: "I've bin clean under de carge, sah!" he said. "An' I done foun' dat de forrud axle am jes' wedged in between two big stones!"

"Just as I thought," said Frank coolly. "Well, Pomp, how can we move those stones?"

"Don' jes' know sah. I fink a jack-screw will be de bes' fing."

"Good for you!"

Frank possessed jack-screws and the necessary tools for extricating the machine from just such a fix as this.

It was certainly remarkable foresight on his part, and now it proved very fortunate indeed.

Pomp made easy work of placing the jack-screw in position. Then the forward axle of the Caravan was gently extricated from its wedge.

The machine was held thus, while Pomp climbed aboard. Then Frank started the dynamos and turned the wheel hard apart.

This cleared the obstruction and the Caravan once more went ahead and for the opposite shore.

But time had been lost, and this was the most valuable of all. The Apaches and the cattle were out of sight.

The depths of the mountain pass had hid them from view.

But Frank went on until the Caravan was at the mouth of the pass.

Then the very difficulty mentioned by Gen. Vaile was encountered.

The ground was too rocky and rough for the Caravan to travel over it.

There was no way but to give up the chase.

To attempt pursuit on foot would be the height of folly.

The Apaches were in such force that they could ambush and kill the whole party.

The plan was out of the question.

So Gen. Vaile at once abandoned it.

"It is a dead loss!" he declared. "Three thousand fine cattle and the lives of six of my best men. Truly I owe the Apache race a bitter revenge!"

"Perhaps we can outwit them yet," declared Frank. "Is there no other way to enter the hills?"

"Yes," replied Vaile, "there is the Main Pass, two miles below."

"Is it large enough to allow the Caravan to pass through it?"

"Yes, I think so!"

"Then let us by all means employ it. No doubt it will take us to the heart of the hills and that is what we want!"

"Yes," declared Gen. Vaile indifferently. "I suppose it is."

It was plain that the general had lost hope and was depressed. But Dexter, the detective, cried:

"By all means! Let us try the pass."

And so it was settled. The Caravan was quickly under way.

But it was found necessary to recross the river. This was done and the Caravan struck out to the southward.

But before they had gone far, Barney, who was in the pilot-house, gave an excited cry.

"Bejabbers, Misther Frank," he cried, "phwat the devil is comin' toward us? Shure is it frind or foe?"

All looked in the direction indicated.

Far out on the plain a solitary horseman was riding toward them at a swinging pace. Not much could be told about him at that long distance.

But all agreed that it was a white man, and Gen. Vaile, after some study, declared:

"Well, that is queer. But even at this distance I can recognize him."

"You can?" gasped Frank. "Pray tell me how?"

"Certainly! by his long, swinging motion in the saddle. I know him well," he spoke, with something like a groan.

"Who is he?"

Frank saw that the general's face was pallid and set. A strange light was in his eyes.

"It is Haven Reed!" he declared. "And he brings serious tidings from the ranch, I feel sure."

"Don't think that!" said Frank, cheerily. "It cannot be so!"

"Yet it is!"

Nearer drew the young ranchero, and it could be seen that he with difficulty sat his horse.

And as he dashed back the brim of his sombrero a hundred yards distant all saw that it was indeed Haven Reed, but that his face was covered with blood.

"My God!" gasped Gen. Vaile. "I know the worst has happened!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ON TO BROKEN BAR.

As young Reed dashed up to the Caravan he, with difficulty, pulled up his horse. He was a fearful sight.

His face was covered with blood from a scalp wound; he was deadly pale and very weak.

"My God! what is wrong, Haven?" shouted Gen. Vaile, with horror and apprehension.

"Oh, the worst," replied Haven, in a feeble voice. "I have ridden all this long distance to find you and tell you."

"You are wounded."

"Yes, I had a fracas with two Apaches out here a few miles who tried to stop me. I am not badly hurt."

"But tell me, how are things at the ranch? Carlotta—she is—"

"Carlotta is gone!"

An awful cry welled up from Vaile's deep throat.

"Gone! Gone!" he cried, in hollow tones. "What do you mean, boy? Gone—captured—stolen away?"

"Yes, stolen away!"

For a moment Gen. Vaile seemed about to fall. The others rushed forward to his assistance.

But he pushed them aside, crying in a hoarse, broken voice:

"Ah, my little Lotta. They have carried her away! God knows to what fate! Curses on them!"

The general's grief was terrible to witness. It was some time before he would in any measure be pacified.

Then Frank said resolutely:

"Have no fear, general! We will rescue her!"

"Rescue!" gasped the agonized father. "Yes, we must rescue her. My life is consecrated to that end now!"

"Amen!" said Reed, hollowly.

"But you have not told me how it happened?" asked the general, finally. "Let me know all about it!"

Haven Reed had dismounted from his horse, and now accepted a glass of wine which Pomp thoughtfully brought him.

This restored him, and he replied:

"How the foe learned that you had departed, and that the ranch was defended by a few, I know not. But suddenly, while we were in the yard taming a new mustang, we heard a scream."

"At once I recognized the voice of Carlotta. I started for the ranch, but before I reached it a score of armed greasers beset the gate. We fought them back and held the ranch, but Carlotta was gone."

"How could that be?" demanded Gen. Vaile, almost fiercely.

"Was she not in the ranch?"

"Yes—oh, yes. But the skulking villain, Dane, had managed to in some way gain admittance, and overpowering her, he made his escape upon his fleetest horse."

"Ye gods!" gasped the general. "Why did you not pursue?"

"Ah! you forget. We were engaged with the greasers. While we were beating them back he made his escape."

Gen. Vaile groaned in his anguish of spirit.

"Oh, my God!" he moaned. "My darling child—my Carlotta is gone!"

Then the old warrior spirit rose in him. Drawing his fine form up to its stateliest height, he cried:

"But enough of this! Let us act! If Carlotta cannot be rescued, we can at least visit vengeance upon her captors!"

"Harrah!" cried Alvin Dexter, the detective, "that is the kind of talk!"

"I believe that Dane has gone straight to Broken Bar!" declared Haven Reed. "He has full sway over that settlement now. It has become a nest of outlaws!"

"For Broken Bar then!" cried Gen. Vaile. "Forward all!"

Frank Reade, Jr., sprang into the pilot-house.

Haven Reed released his lagged mustang and clambered aboard. Then the Caravan set out to the southward.

Broken Bar was a small collection of adobe huts at the junction of the Black River and a tributary.

The spot was once the site of an ancient pueblo, and the dwellings were built up from the ruins of this.

It was a rendezvous for Greasers, cut-throats and gamblers. The respectable cowboy shunned the place as he valued his life and reputation.

It was true that Black Max was the demagogue of the place.

His word was law in Broken Bar. Few dared gainsay it.

Truly Gen. Vaile's neighbors were not of the most desirable kind.

Yet the general had always got along peaceably enough with all until the discovery of the cattle thefts of Black Max was made.

Already the general saw that his only hope of future prosperity on the Black Range was the wiping out of the entire gang at Broken Bar.

Now that he had the co-operation of Frank Reade, Jr., and his electric caravan this seemed a possibility.

It was nightfall when the caravan reached the valley in which the Greaser town was situated.

Already the lights could be seen in the gloom.

And now a plan of procedure was discussed. To attack the place openly with the Caravan it was agreed was not altogether the best of taste.

"First," said Frank Reade, Jr., "I think we had better ascertain whether or not Dane and his crew have returned to the town. If we learn that they are there, then we will be better justified in attacking the place."

"Good!" cried Dexter, the detective. "Then I have a proposal to make."

"What is it?"

"Simply this. Let myself and two or three others visit the town in disguise and size the place up. I would like especially to get a look at this Black Max!"

"It shall be done!" cried Frank Reade, Jr. "I will go with you. Let the others be Mr. Reed and Gen. Vaile."

"And Barney and Pomp will stay with the Caravan!"

"Yes!"

Barney and Pomp did not demur.

They never questioned their employer's orders for wise and politic reasons. Yet either would have jumped out of his skin for the privilege of going.

Preparations were soon made.

The Caravan found cover in a clump of cacti, not half a mile distant from the Greaser settlement.

Frank and Dexter, Reed and Gen. Vaile adopted the costume of Mexicans and darkened their faces with a pigment.

Their disguises were exceedingly good, and they felt safe enough as they left the Caravan.

They were armed to the teeth.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Haven Reed were to be the spokesmen, as they understood the Mexican language better than the others.

They set off for the settlement with all haste. It did not take long to cover the half mile.

As they approached the collection of "dobys," they saw that all were lit up, and a great crowd of lawless men thronged the doorways and the main street.

Various were the scenes witnessed.

In some of the buildings men were drinking and throwing dice or playing at cards.

Outside they were trading mustangs, practicing with the lariat, or playing musical pipes and dancing.

No women ever found access to Broken Bar.

It was essentially a "gander" town. Indeed, women in the region about were very seldom seen.

As the four disguised men sauntered leisurely among the Greasers they were not noticed, and certainly they did not arouse suspicion.

Dexter, the detective, was keenly on the outlook.

This was his prime opportunity, and he made the most of it. He was most anxious to get a glimpse of Black Max.

There was no doubt in the detective's mind that he was identical with Danton Maxwell, the murderer.

The detective's whole being thrilled with the thought that he might succeed in capturing his bird.

If he should, his fame would be established. His zeal can, therefore, be well understood.

The quartette strolled observant through the town. Nothing escaped their keen and penetrating gaze.

In the center of the collection of dobys was a larger structure than the others.

It bore the appearance of a hostelry, and sported a large bar and card room. This was crowded.

Here the four spies paused.

"I think this is the most likely place to find our man," said Haven Reed.

"All right. Let us enter," said Dexter.

This was done. They filed into the place. Newcomers were always expected to patronize the bar.

Accordingly our quartette did so. The liquor was something vile, but they managed to swallow it.

Then Reed called for a pack of cards, and they seated themselves at a table.

They played friendly games to avoid suspicion. Their play was not noticed, however, for the swearing, drinking crowd of Greasers were too intent in their own hands.

"This is our best chance of finding Black Max," said Reed. "If he has returned from the range, he will surely be here!"

Dexter, the detective, was on the *qui vive*.

Time passed, but he did not appear. Then, just as our friends were beginning to lose patience, a thrilling thing occurred.

Two Greasers, at a table back of them, suddenly quarreled.

"Per christo!" hissed one, springing up, "you insult me, son of a dog! Dare you say I cheat!"

"Diablo!" gritted the other, "you are a scoundrel and a thief!"

"For that you shall die!"

"Jesus! not until I have given you the length of my knife!"

The table was overturned, and the angry players faced each other. The other gamblers looked up with idle interest.

The proprietor did not interfere.

So common a thing as a gamester's quarrel scarce interested any.

It was certain that the two hot-headed Mexicans would have fought.

But at that moment a heavy step struck the threshold. A powerful framed man appeared.

He was a giant in stature, with dark flushed face and bloodshot eyes gleaming under the depressed brim of his sombrero.

At sight of him instantly the two angry gamblers dropped into their seats.

"Carrambo!" gasped one. "It is Black Max!"

The newcomer's gaze, however, was fixed eagle-like upon them.

"So ho!" he roared, with a toss of his head like a wild bull. "Ye will fight, eh? Coxcombs! I've a mind to make ye fight with me. I haven't shed blood for an hour, and it's time I tried my hand. Ho, ho, ho! Cowards, are ye? See 'em tremble when Black Max speaks!"

And the frontier bully roared with mocking laughter.

But the two Mexicans and, indeed, every other man in the room, ventured not to cross the mood of the bad man of Broken Bar.

CHAPTER IX.

DEXTER GETS RECKLESS.

Too many lives were charged to the account of Black Max for his presence not to terrify the cowardly Greasers.

Not one of them but had a superstitious fear of this man, who always came out ahead in a shooting scrape, and who bore the reputation of a charmed life.

"Hey you, Miguel Toredo!" cried the bully, "stand up like a man and tell me what you're disturbing the peace for?"

The darkest of the quarreling Greasers scrambled to his feet.

The bully's hand was upon his pistol butt. Quick as a flash he pulled it and fired directly at Miguel.

Black Max had the reputation of being the quickest man on the drop in that part of the West.

The bullet went true to its mark. It cut the tassel from Miguel Toredo's cap.

The Mexican with a yell of terror went to the floor. But Black Max roared with laughter.

"Git up, ye white livered dog!" he cried. "Ye're not killed yet. I was only having some fun with ye."

Toredo scrambled to his feet and, pallid and terrified, crept back to his seat. Now that he had had his little joke and believed that his monarchy in the bar-room was established, Black Max relaxed his bullying manner.

"Walk up, everybody!" he cried. "Here goes for the crowd. Toss 'em up, yew drink mixer, and let's have the best ye've got."

The Mexicans all flocked to the bar, not daring to disregard the summons.

But our quartette did not do so. In fact, if they had been allowed second thought, it was likely that for policy's sake they would have done so.

But they were so intent in watching their man that this did not occur to any one of them.

"As I live!" exclaimed Dexter, in deep excitement, "I believe that is my man. I think that he is Danton Maxwell."

"I have a mind to shoot him now like the dog he is!" exclaimed Gen. Vaile.

But Frank Reade, Jr., said:

"No, do not be rash. We will play him two for one yet."

"All walk up!" roared the bad man of Broken Bar. "It's my treat. Every man walk up!"

Then his blood-shot gaze was turned upon the four men who had yet kept their seats.

He stared at them a moment. It was not possible for him to identify them as other than Greasers in their present dress.

And the bully reckoned them as setting his authority at defiance. This inflamed his temper.

With an oath he whipped out his revolvers.

"Curse ye!" he yelled, "didn't I say for all to walk to the bar? Are ye coming or not?"

At that moment Alvin Dexter, the usually cool-headed detective, lost command of himself and retorted:

"We obey no mandate of yours, Danton Maxwell, murderer!"

The words rang out sharp and clear. The effect was astounding.

The bully started back as if shot and lowered his pistols. He bent forward like a tiger at bay, and fixing his swollen gaze upon the other, hissed:

"Who the deuce are you?"

"I am a man of the law!" cried Dexter, springing up and whipping out a pair of manacles. "You are my prisoner in the name of the law. I arrest you for the Howells murder, a crime of which you are guilty!"

The daring detective sprang toward the petrified villain. It seemed as if the wretch had lost all command of himself.

But only for a moment.

Then a yell like that of a maddened wild beast escaped his throat. He brought up the pistols again but swift as a flash the detective struck them down.

Both bullets went through the floor.

Then Dexter was at the wretch's throat. The two were enwrapped in each other's arms in a deadly struggle.

The others, Gen. Vaile, Frank and Haven Reed saw that the crisis so rashly precipitated by the detective called for their co-operation.

To refuse it would be fatal.

To attempt, however, to arrest the villain there upon his own stamping ground had been an act of folly upon the part of Dexter.

The detective was plucky and had instantly got his man at a disadvantage.

Unhindered, it was possible that he might have overpowered and secured him. But this was not permitted.

The villain yelled lusty commands to his confreres, the Mexicans. In a moment the melee became general.

In the midst of it, however, the detective managed to deal Maxwell a blow upon the head which knocked him senseless.

But he saw at once that it was going to be impossible for him to secure his man.

Realizing this, he shouted to his friends:

"Get into the street! Separate!"

The others heard this. At once they fought their way out of the barroom. By this time the din had begun to call a crowd to the spot.

But our friends had managed to overcome the Mexicans in the barroom, and now held them at bay with loaded revolvers.

In this manner gaining the street, Frank Reade, Jr., took the lead, crying:

"Break away, lads! Follow me!"

With which he darted to the rear of the adobe hut. The others followed, and they had gained fully a hundred yards before the Mexicans were heard in their rear.

The course taken by Frank Reade, Jr. was the best possible one.

It was toward the river and they reached its banks just in time to escape the shower of bullets sent after them.

Here was a mighty belt of timber and once in this they were safe.

The gloom enabled them to easily distance their pursuers.

At length, breathless and exhausted they came to a halt. This was in a small chaparral.

No sound of the pursuers was now to be heard. They were safe. But not one of them had escaped without slight wounds.

Dexter was the most disgusted of all.

"I was a fool!" he cried.

"I think you were unwise," said Vaile.

"You acted too soon!" ventured Frank.

"I know it!" said the detective, disappointedly. "It was my eager haste to make a prisoner of that rogue."

"But your time had not come!"

"I see it now."

However, there was little use in crying over spilt milk. So the best was made of the situation.

"What is our best move now?" asked Haven Reed.

"I think we had better return to the Caravan," declared Frank.

"So do I," agreed Gen. Vaile.

"But—ought we not to make some attempt to learn the fate of Carlotta?" asked Haven Reed.

"Yes," replied Frank, "but I think we can do better with the Caravan now than without it."

"All right."

This settled the question.

All set out to find the spot where the Caravan was left. This was by no means an easy task.

In the gloom it was extremely hard to settle the proper direction to take.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the adventurers should run into most dangerous localities and incur some exciting experiences.

They had succeeded in getting out of the chaparral at last and were crossing a broad strip of open land, when suddenly Frank Reade, Jr., who was in the lead, halted.

"St!" he exclaimed. "Keep perfectly quiet!"

"What is the matter?" whispered Dexter.

"Look!"

All now saw plainly the cause of Frank's words. Just ahead, in the gloom, were shadowy forms.

They were mounted, and seemed to be coming directly toward our friends.

Indeed, they had just time to shrink into a copse. The unknown passed near enough to be within reach.

And outlined against the sky their forms were seen to be those of Indians. They were Apaches and moving southward.

Doubtless they were of Long Lance's band. Where were they going?

When the last one had passed, the crouching white men arose, and Gen. Vaile was the first to speak.

"What is their game?"

"They seem to be going toward Broken Bar," said Haven Reed.

"That is true," agreed Frank Reade, Jr. "I have an idea."

"What?"

"They are going down to confer with Danton Maxwell. He and Long Lance are bosom friends, you know."

"That is it exactly!" cried Gen. Vaile. "I would give much to know the result of that conference."

"There is a way," said Dexter.

"How?"

"Follow them!"

This move was instantly decided upon. The muffled tread of the Indian ponies could be heard in the distance ahead.

This was sufficient guide, and the white trailers followed it. Haven Reed, who was the best Indian tactician, led the way.

For some while the party went on in this fashion. But this could not continue long, for the settlement was not far distant.

Soon the lights of the town burst into view. Then the Apaches were seen gathered in a knot in the verge of the chaparral.

Several of them had torches, and they seemed to be signaling.

The party of white trailers stealthily crept into the chaparral and gained a point directly in the rear of the savages.

Here they could see and hear and not be seen. Some time elapsed.

The Apaches seemed to be waiting for something. Then a tall form was seen coming up the slope.

It was a white man, and as he came within the circle of light made by the glare of the torches, the watching white men recognized him as Danton Maxwell.

The desperado walked straight up to Long Lance. They gripped hands and then after a few guttural remarks the chief led the way into the verge of the chaparral.

They were now but a few feet from the white trailers and each held his breath in deepest excitement.

Every word could be plainly heard.

"My red brother has done well," the desperado said, in a gruff voice. "He has stampeded many of my white enemy's cattle."

"My white brother speaks the truth," replied Long Lance. "I seek now the scalps of the strange men of fire who have slaughtered so many of my braves."

"You mean that curious chap with the electric wagon?"

"My white brother knows."

"Yes, and I don't understand why our men did not capture that devil. But we'll have him yet."

"Long Lance awaits his white brother's commands."

"Good! We must now rig up a new plan to exterminate the whole lot of them. Curse them! Not one must be spared!"

CHAPTER X.

BARNEY AND POMP TO THE RESCUE.

WHEN Danton Maxwell made this blood-thirsty remark he little dreamed that the subjects of it were so near at hand.

It was well for them that their presence was unsuspected.

Long Lance, the Apache, seemed to be pleased with the declaration of the villain that their foes must be exterminated.

"The spirits of my dead brethren cry out for their blood!" said the Apache chief. "But my white brother has captured the pale face squaw!"

"Right!" cried Maxwell, with fiendish delight. "Ah! that was a rich prize. And she is pretty, too. Egad, she has my heart and she shall be my squaw!"

At this brutal declaration Haven Reed gritted his teeth fiercely.

Twice he raised his rifle to shoot the dastard, but he lowered it each time as he realized the folly of such a move.

"My time will come!" he reflected. "First, Carlotta must be saved!"

All were in hopes that Maxwell would betray the spot where he held Carlotta captive.

But he did not do this.

The balance of the conversation between him and the Apache chief, concerned an attack upon Black River Ranch to be made on the morrow.

"Every Greaser in Broken Bar shall be there!" cried Maxwell, fiercely.

Then the interview terminated.

Long Lance mounted his horse, and with a guttural adieu the whole cavalcade dashed away.

They were almost instantly out of sight. The villain Maxwell stood a moment in a sort of reverie.

"The game is well in my hands," he gritted. "There is nothing to bar my eventually gaining possession of that ranch and the Black Range. Then I shall be a cattle prince, and Carlotta shall be my princess!"

"Not this time!" said a gritting voice, in his rear. "Hands up!" Like a flash the desperado wheeled.

But it was to feel a cold pistol barrel against his face. A rough grip was on his shoulder.

About him were dark forms. For a moment he was stunned. Then a bitter curse dropped from his lips.

"What devil's work is this?" he gritted. "Who are ye?"

"You know me well!" said the hard voice of Gen. Vaile. "Now, Danton Maxwell, your life is in our hands. You must do our bidding."

The white trailers in hiding in the chaparral would have been worse than fools not to seize the opportunity so gloriously given them.

Even as Maxwell had been making his soliloquy the word was passed in whisper from lip to lip.

Haven Reed was instantly at the villain's shoulder, with his revolver pressed against the wretch's face.

Maxwell was a desperate and reckless villain.

Yet men of his class ever place the highest value upon life. He knew that it would be death to disregard that command.

So he simply said:

"Ye have the drop—I yield!"

Quickly Alvin Dexter slipped the manacles on his wrists. He was now hopelessly a prisoner.

"Now," said Gen. Vaile, sternly, "we will give you one chance for life. Tell us, what have you done with Carlotta?"

The wretch was silent a moment.

Then a hoarse laugh broke from his lips.

"Ah, that is my revenge!" he cried, jeeringly. "I'll never tell. No man on earth knows but me. She will starve and I shall have my revenge!"

It was useless to attempt to get more than this out of the wretch.

He would yield no more.

At length, abandoning the attempt, Gen. Vaile said:

"Come, let us take him to the Caravan. Once there, we will find some way to get the truth out of him!"

So the party set out for the Caravan.

Again they were puzzled to find the way. But at length Frank Reade, Jr., got his bearings from the lights of Broken Bar.

It looked as if the party had the best of the situation.

They had the arch villain a prisoner and it would now seem to be only in order to force a confession from him as to the whereabouts of Carlotta.

Then they could descend upon Broken Bar, and wipe it out of existence and forever disband the nest of ruffians there.

Then Black Range would be free from its most deadly incubus. It would not be difficult to keep the hostile Apache beyond the mountains.

But, as near incidents were to prove, the best laid plans "aft gang aglee.

The party had reached what seemed a certain point of safety, when suddenly lights flashed all about them, and from a chaparral near a score of dark forms rushed.

An instant comprehension of the situation flashed upon Maxwell.

He was quick to act.

"*Jesu pity, camarades!*" he yelled. "I am a prisoner. Help!"

Instantly Haven stopped the desperado's mouth.

But it was too late.

His words had been heard, and the Mexicans were instantly surrounding the party with loud yells and curses.

Pistols flashed in the darkness, bullets whistled, and then came the close combat. The odds were too great, and seeing it, Frank Reade, Jr., shouted:

"Break for the Caravan! Seek safety and we will regain the prisoner yet."

The order was obeyed.

The hold upon the manacled desperado was reluctantly released, and the Caravan's party broke away.

A running fight followed, and it was possible that the result might have been serious.

But at that moment a rumbling sound like distant thunder was heard. Then a great and dazzling light broke over the scene.

Instantly Frank Reade, Jr., shouted:

"Hang to it, friends! The Caravan is coming!"

Sagacious Barney and Pomp, hearing the melee, had at once guessed the cause, and started the Caravan to the rescue.

They had come in the nick of time.

The Mexicans terrified broke and fled for the settlement. In a few seconds the vicinity was clear.

The Caravan's party at once rushed for the machine. Barney and Pomp, excited but overjoyed, met them at the rail.

"Bress de Lor, Marse Frank, yo' am safe!" cried Pomp, joyfully.

"Be jabbers!" cried Barney, "we thought yez might be in this ruction, an' we cum down to help yez!"

"And you came in the nick of time," replied Frank, happily. "I think we are all here. Let's count noses."

Gen. Vaile and Haven Reed were by Frank's side.

But Alvin Dexter was missing. Where was the detective? Had he fallen in the fight? A chill struck all.

"Where is Dexter?" exclaimed Frank. "I thought he was at my shoulder when the Caravan came."

"So did I," said Reed.

The search-light was now employed, and search was made for the missing man. But no trace of him could be found.

If he was dead, his body was also missing. The bodies of two dead Mexicans were found, but not that of the detective.

"It was certainly a mystery.

But time was precious. It was found necessary to give up the quest.

"He may turn up all right yet," declared Frank. "I hope he may." This wish was echoed by all. The detective had made himself well-liked.

But the question now was, what should be done?

"There is but one move," declared Frank Reade, Jr. "We must wipe that den of vipers off the earth."

"What! Destroy the settlement?" asked Gen. Vaile.

"Yes. Have you any objections?"

"Objections!" gasped the general. "Well, I should say not."

"Then here goes!"

The Caravan shot forward.

In a few moments it was in close rifle shot of the adobe village. Here Frank brought it to a halt.

He was ever averse to taking human life, so he decided to first explode a dynamite shell over the town as a warning to its denizens to leave it.

"If you should blow up the whole tribe of them it would be no crime!" declared Gen. Vaile.

"I think this will be better," declared Frank. "If we drive them out of their den and destroy it that will be something."

"You are right."

Frank elevated the dynamo gun and inserted a time shell, to burst three seconds after leaving the gun.

Then he pressed the electric key.

Up into the air like a meteor shot the dynamite shell. There was a slight parabola; then—one, two, three seconds, and—

Crash—boom!

There was a terrific roar and a fearful blaze in the dark sky as the bomb exploded. Every adobe dwelling in Broken Bar was shaken to the foundation.

The Mexicans took the cue.

They had no desire to stand such a bombardment. Naturally cowards, they were now in abject terror.

Out of the town, on horseback or afoot, in the wildest haste they rushed. And Frank now began his fearful work of destruction.

He aimed the gun at the nearest "doby," which was deserted. In a fraction of a second it was nothing but a heap of dust and debris.

And so, straight through the town, went the destroyer.

With the coming of sunrise, not a dwelling was standing in Broken Bar, and every cutthroat and desperado was seeking safety in the mountains.

The cattle stealing gang had this time received a lesson they could not very well ever forget.

But there was yet lots of work for the Caravan to do.

Alvin Dexter's fate must be learned. Danton Maxwell must be captured or run down, and Carlotta Vaile rescued.

These were all gigantic undertakings, but Frank Reade, Jr., did not shrink from them. At once he turned the caravan toward the hills.

A pass was found and threaded, and soon the machine was in a long and fertile valley in the heart of the mountains.

But here were numberless hiding-places, and it looked like a tremendous undertaking to find the man they wanted in that wilderness.

All that day the Caravan searched the hills. Despair and utter hopelessness had begun to settle down upon Gen. Vaile.

"Ah, I shall never see my darling again!" he groaned. "My Carlotta is lost!"

"Don't say that," said Frank, cheerfully; "this is only the first day of the quest."

The sun had just begun to gild the Western hill-tops. The Caravan at the moment was skirting a steep slope, when suddenly a startling incident occurred.

Those on the deck of the Caravan became witnesses of a scene which sent the blood in hot currents through their veins. None there ever forgot it.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DETECTIVE'S ADVENTURES.

ALVIN DEXTER's disappearance was easily accounted for.

He was wholly possessed of the mad desire to bag his man, the desperado Maxwell, and this led him to adopt more reckless measures than he would ordinarily have dared.

He did not fall victim to any of the bullets whistling so closely about him.

Indeed, he seemed to bear a charmed life, for he was in the very thickest of the fight. His eyes were upon Maxwell, and when the Mexicans broke and fled he was in the rabble.

Being in Mexican garb he was not identified as a foe.

He kept his gaze as long as possible upon Maxwell, whose manacles had not yet been removed.

Down into Broken Bar went the crowd of Mexicans.

And still the shrewd detective kept Maxwell in sight. Once in the town a great crowd gathered around the desperado.

Maxwell's first command was for a smith to break his manacles.

None could be found at the moment, but a Mexican stepped forward with a steel file and a bottle of oil and in a remarkably short space of time had liberated the villain.

Dexter watched the whole operation.

Of course it would have been madness to have interfered. But he was resolved to shadow his man thenceforth.

Not if he could help it should he again get out of his sight. It was at this juncture that the bomb exploded warningly over the town.

At once there was a stampede.

The Mexicans realized that Frank Reade, Jr., meant business, and they did not waste time in vacating so hot a locality.

They spread in every direction, each man for himself.

Dexter still kept close watch of his man. Whatever command Maxwell had over the Mexicans was now lost.

The villain began now to shirk for himself. He made his way hastily to a corral near, and catching the first mustang at hand, mounted him.

For a moment Dexter was dismayed.

It looked to him plainly as if the game was up. He was for a moment in a quandary.

But just then a happy chance presented itself.

Near by and hitched to a sapling was a horse saddled and bridled. Its owner did not seem to be near.

Neither did the detective wait for the owner or his permission.

He instantly leaped into the saddle. A touch of the heel and the mustang was off. Maxwell was just ahead.

Out upon the plain rode pursued and pursuer. Others were riding in the same direction. So Maxwell for a time did not suspect that he was being pursued.

But soon he was clear of the fleeing mob. He turned across the lowlands toward the river.

He was now alone.

Reaching the water, he quickly forded the stream. Reaching the other bank, he galloped away toward the hills.

And now an idea occurred to Dexter.

At first he had thought of riding down his man and trying to capture him single handed.

But second thought caused him to abandon this idea. From the course taken by the villain, Dexter reckoned that he meant to strike some objective point in the hills.

Might not this be the hiding-place or retreat where he had taken Carlotta Vaile?

The thought endowed the detective with the resolution to kill two birds with one stone.

Why not shadow his man until he had reached this place? The detective was resolved to do so.

So he forded the river and kept a respectful distance behind his man. Fortunately Maxwell did not look back.

Had he done so his suspicions might have been aroused at sight of the stranger pursuing him.

Soon the land began to rise as the hills were reached. A steep ascent was made and then Maxwell vanished into a narrow pass.

The detective urged his horse on.

But when he reached the mouth of the pass, Maxwell was not in sight. Fearful that he might elude him the detective hastened forward.

But still he did not come in sight of his man.

Forward he dashed at full speed. This in the course of a few moments brought him out of the pass.

Into a little sink or depression among the hills he rode. There seemed no outlet. This was apparently the end of the pass.

Maxwell was not in sight.

But the pony he had been riding was grazing quietly in the glade. In spite of the dense gloom the detective could see this.

At once the correct idea struck Dexter.

This was as far as Maxwell could go with a horse. Here he had taken to his feet and was probably scaling some mountain path above.

Realizing the logic of this, the detective acted quickly.

He threw himself from his pony's back, and with the rein skillfully hobbled him. Then he set about finding the path.

Fortune favored the detective.

As it happened there was but one point where the steep walls of the inclosure could be scaled.

Here Dexter found what was a well-beaten path. He lost no time in following it.

Up over ledges and steep heights he went. Soon he clambered over the edge of a small plateau.

Back of this was the mountain wall.

The detective saw a bright light just ahead and the outlines of what looked like the mouth of a cavern.

It was now necessary to use caution. He crept forward stealthily.

It was well that he did this. Suddenly in the gloom, a dark form towered up beside him.

It brushed past him as he crouched beside a bowlder. Outlined against the sky the detective recognized Maxwell.

Once more the impulse was upon him to seize his man.

But again he restrained himself. The desperado passed along the verge of the plateau and disappeared.

"That is queer!" muttered the detective. "Where is he going?"

He seemed to come from the direction of the cave. But there was no time to be lost in useless rumination.

The detective's first impulse had been to follow his man.

But he put this aside now and went on toward the cave.

In a very few moments he was in a position whence he could see the interior.

And it was a startling scene he beheld.

A fire burned in the floor of the cavern. Rough mats and skins were thrown about and hung upon the walls.

Upon a bench by the fire sat an aged Indian squaw, crooning and rocking herself back and forward.

But back against the wall, the picture of despair, sat a beautiful young girl. It was Carlotta Vaile.

The quick-witted detective read the situation at a glance.

This was the prison of the fair captive, and the squaw was her keeper. The detective was not ten seconds in making up his mind to a plan of action.

He drew his revolver and walked boldly into the place. The squaw started up with a guttural cry, and caught up a rifle.

But Dexter said, sternly:

"Drop it! I have the line on you and I will shoot!"

Trembling in terror the squaw at once obeyed. The detective picked up a thong and bound her hands and feet and gagged her.

Carlotta Vaile had sprung up with a wild glad cry.

"Oh, thank God! You have come to save me!" she cried.

"I have!" said the detective, "but tell me quickly. Are others about?"

"Oh, yes, a fearful gang of ruffians and they are in the lower cavern."

"The lower cavern?"

"Yes, just under this!"

"Ah, I see. But Maxwell—has he not been here?"

"He has just gone down to the lower cave."

"Then he is apt to return any moment?"

"Yes."

Like a flash the detective had formulated his plan of action. He took the young girl's hand.

"Come!" he said. "I am going to save you!"

He led her out to the path which extended down to the little glade where the horses were grazing.

"You are not afraid?" he asked.

"No!" she replied.

He thrust a revolver into her hand.

"If anyone stops you, shoot them. Follow this path down. You will find two horses grazing there. Take one and ride for your life. You can find your way back to your father's ranch."

"Oh, yes."

"Then go!"

"But you—"

"I am going to bag my man. I mean to get him before I go."

She said no more. Down the path she vanished. The detective turned back to the cavern. Reaching it, he crouched in the shadows at its entrance.

He had barely done this when he heard footsteps approaching.

Maxwell was returning.

Now his burly form loomed up in the firelight. He was at the cavern entrance, and had halted as he saw the squaw lying there, bound hand and foot.

"Sdeath!" he gritted. "What's this?"

Then, like an avalanche, Dexter was upon him. The detective threw him, and almost before the villain could think, had manacles upon him again.

"Not a word!" gritted the nifty detective. "It will mean death. I have bagged you at last, my man!"

A smothered curse escaped the desperado's lips. But he was powerless. The detective thrust a gag into his mouth.

Then he placed the revolver at his temple.

"Now get up and walk!" he said.

The villain obeyed.

Across the plateau they went. Soon they were descending by the path. When they reached the glade below the outlaw's horse was found grazing.

The other was gone.

The detective knew that Carlotta had taken it. He made his prisoner mount the remaining mustang.

Then he sprang up behind him, and still holding the revolver at his captive's head, said in a voice of steel:

"You must obey me in everything! If not I will shoot you. Take up the reins and ride; no treachery!"

What could the villain do but obey.

At that moment loud yells of discovery were heard on the bluff above. But it was too late.

The desperado was too much of a coward to attempt a stand against such odds.

He had no doubt that the detective would keep his words and shoot him. So he reined the mustang, and the sure-footed animal with its double load went galloping down the canyon. The plucky detective had bagged his man.

CHAPTER XII.

CARLOTTA'S ESCAPE.

It required no slight nerve for Carlotta Vaile to follow the detective's instructions.

But she was a plucky and determined girl. She realized that liberty depended upon the move.

Therefore she did not hesitate to follow his instructions.

Down the dark path she felt her way. Soon she reached the glade below.

There were two mustangs yet grazing where they were left.

Now Carlotta was a fine horsewoman? It was easy for her, then, to catch the detective's mustang and remove the hobble.

Then she vaulted into the saddle.

Lest there might be misapprehension in the minds of our feminine readers, let us explain that in certain parts of the wild West it is wholly customary for ladies to ride man-fashion, or astride.

Ladies' saddles are an unknown quantity, and as mustangs are vicious and tricky, the safest way is ever the best.

So Carlotta made no hesitation in mounting the mustang in the natural way, and giving him rein, rode away down the canyon pass. Soon she had reached the open country, and later came to the river. The lights of Broken Bar, or rather, the conflagration, was visible. She knew that her father's ranch was due northwest.

So she followed the river, relying upon it as a sure guide, until she should reach the Black Range.

Then she would be at home with her surroundings. With glad some sensations she galloped rapidly on.

Even at that distance to her ears from the doomed town came yells and cries and the crash of the explosions.

She rode on through the darkness, the cool night air fanning her cheeks.

Her spirits rose as the air revived her, and experienced a wonderful feeling of buoyancy which was enjoyable.

She had tested the little horse which she rode sufficiently to know that he was quite nimble on his feet.

So she felt sure of a good chance in a race for life should she run across foes.

Carlotta had spent time enough on the ranch to learn much of the wild Western life.

She had acquired quite a knowledge of border life and Indian warfare. Her father's range was so contiguous to the Apache country, that collisions with the hostile savages were of almost weekly occurrence.

This proved a vast aid to her, as near incidents were to prove.

She had ridden many miles along the bottom land. All the while her senses were upon the alert.

She knew well enough the danger of meeting a band of Apaches.

In such a contingency, if she fell into their hands it was death. Therefore she kept constant watch.

She could see but few objects on the wide plain between her and the horizon line, but she trusted in Providence, and kept her horse as much as possible in the soft soil, so that his hoof beats were dulled.

And now, presently, the east began to grow light. The first hues of dawn began to appear.

This was most gratifying, for she realized that it would be easier for her to find her way.

But just as this gratifying truth dawned upon her, she experienced a thrill of mingled terror and doubt.

Just to the northeast, and riding as if to head her off, she suddenly espied a moving body of horsemen.

They had come into sight suddenly as if risen from the plain, and almost in that moment Carlotta fancied that they had seen her.

Instantly she pulled up her horse.

For a moment her heart beat like a trip-hammer. It was an exciting moment, and she knew that her movements now would quickly decide her fate.

Very coolly, however, she accepted the situation. Her nerve did not desert her.

Her first move, she told herself, was to make sure that the distant horsemen were foes.

They might be Indians, and again they might be friends. How was this to be determined? She quickly decided.

She remembered that she had heard a cowboy tell his method of determining the nature of a band of horsemen in a precisely similar fix.

She slipped from the mustang's back. Holding the tether in one hand, she crouched down and waited until the horsemen topped a rise in the prairie and were brought sharp in outline against the eastern sky.

Yes, they were Indians. She could see their waving plumes, their irregular line and their long lances.

"Come, pony!" she cried, springing to her feet, "it is life or death for us. Now show your mettle!"

The little steed pranced as she mounted him. A moment more and off he raced toward the hills.

But in that moment Carlotta fancied that to her ears came a distant yell. She knew that she was discovered.

On toward the hills she rode.

The coming of day on the level plains is speedy. After the first light the sun rapidly rises above the horizon.

It was broad daylight before Carlotta's horse reached the hills.

She looked back and saw that the red men had spread their line out so as to cut off all attempt to escape north or south.

"They mean to drive me into the hills," she muttered. "Ah, well, I am willing to go, for there I can find hiding!"

She rode through a little defile and now was in a valley. Across this she dashed and followed a tortuous ravine. Then across another valley and the pony began to show signs of fatigue.

Carlotta pulled him up just under a clump of hemlock trees. There was no sign or sound of the red foe.

She believed that she had outwitted them. At least there was no better place to hide.

So she dismounted and touched her pony's knees with her hands. He was trained, and readily obeying, laid down.

But Carlotta at that moment forgot one important thing.

She overlooked the fact that the savages would follow her trail. Not until the peril came did she realize it.

"They will do well if they find me here," she mused. "We will

wait here a few hours, pony. Then they will probably give up the quest and we can escape."

But Carlotta had reckoned wrong.

An hour passed by.

Thus far nothing was seen of the red foe. Carlotta felt sure that she had eluded them, when her blood almost froze with a thrilling sight.

Up a little rise of land at the entrance to the valley came several of the Apaches.

They were walking slowly, leading their ponies and studying the ground. Like a flash all came over Carlotta.

"My soul, they are trailing me!" she gasped. "They will come here, even right to the spot!"

In an instant she was upon her pony's back. Not a moment must be lost.

There was no time for hesitation. All depended upon quick action. Out of the hemlock scrub sprang the pony and girl rider. Like a meteor the lithe mustang sped up the valley.

There was the sound of a wild Indian yell. Once Carlotta looked back and saw the red foe in pursuit.

On and on she rode madly.

She knew not what course to take. That she left with the pony. Anywhere so that she escaped.

And the pony, sagacious animal, took the only avenue of escape from the valley.

This was a deep and rocky pass. On sped the sure-footed, nimble creature. Down through the gorge, over rocky steeps which ordinarily would have appalled the girl rider.

Still on she rode.

And after her came the yelling Apaches.

At length the canyon walls began to melt down. The level was reached and the next moment Carlotta dashed out upon the lowlands.

It was at this critical moment that we left the Caravan and party at the close of a preceding chapter.

It was a thrilling sight to those aboard the Caravan to see the young girl dash out of that mountain pass followed by the yelling Apaches.

A great cry went up from all on board the Caravan.

Quick as a flash Frank Reade, Jr., sprang to the wheel and changed its course. Then he went to the electric gun.

"Carlotta!" screamed Haven Reed. "It is her. Fire! Riddle the red hounds! Don't let them overtake her!"

Gen. Vaile echoed the cry. Barney was now at the wheel, and Pomp handed Frank a dynamite projectile.

He placed it in the breech and trained the gun.

Then he pressed the electric key.

The projectile struck in the midst of the savage horde. There was an earthquake-like roar and the ponies and rearskins were scattered every way.

Of the score of savages in the band scarce half a dozen were left.

These fled incontinently to the hills. The rescue was complete.

Carlotta, upon seeing the Caravan, instantly rode toward it. The next moment she was in her father's arms.

The joy of Gen. Vaile could not be expressed in words. But there was another scarcely less pleased.

This was Haven Reed, the young lover.

Explanations were soon in order.

Carlotta told her thrilling story. That part of it which concerned the detective interested all.

"I tell you he is a plucky fellow, that Dexter!" cried Gen. Vaile.

"I wish I knew whether he succeeded in bagging his man or not!"

"There is one way to learn!" said Frank Reade, Jr.

"How?"

"Why, take a run down there!"

"I am agreeable."

And this move was decided upon. Indeed it looked no more than fair that they should endeavor to ascertain the fate of the plucky detective.

So instead of going to the ranch, the course was changed, and the Caravan took a back track.

But Carlotta had become deeply attached to the little mustang which had saved her life.

"I want always to keep him," she declared. "He is a game little fellow."

"But we cannot take him with us," said Gen. Vaile, dubiously.

"I have it," said Haven Reed. "Brand and hobble him and leave him here. I will come out later and get him."

This seemed the best plan.

Therefore it was done. The little mustang was quickly given the Vaile brand and then left to graze.

The Caravan now headed toward the ruined settlement of Broken Bar.

A quick run was made over the range. Frank showed his passengers what speed the Caravan could attain.

It was easily forty miles an hour on the level plain. Gen. Vaile was delighted.

"You had better come out here and settle with us, Mr. Reade!" he cried. "This is just the country for you. With the Caravan you could soon clean out the Apaches and make life comfortable for cattlemen on this range."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END.

BUT Frank Reade, Jr., could not see the point.

He shook his head, saying:

"I fear that will not be possible. I appreciate your kind wishes, general, but my ties are all in Readestown."

"I am coming to Readestown to see you some time."

"You will be very welcome. I always enjoy guests and I will do all in my power to entertain you."

The Caravan had now come in sight of the ruins of Broken Bar. It was the hour of noon.

But not a living being was seen about the place. It was deserted and dreary enough.

"That is a blessing you have conferred upon us in breaking up that nest of vipers!" declared Gen. Vaile.

"I am glad of that!" replied Frank. "I hope you will never have trouble with them again."

"I feel sure we shall not!"

Carlotta now directed the way to the pass through which the den of Maxwell was reached.

The Caravan could not make its way up there. But Frank and Barney, with the general and Haven Reed, armed to the teeth, went up.

They gained the plateau and found the desperado's cavern. But it was deserted.

The lower cavern was also found. Here were discovered evidences that the cutthroat gang had packed up and fled.

The chase was over.

There was nothing to do but to return to the ranch. The fate of Alvin Dexter was unsolved.

The Caravan was now headed for the ranch. It was late in the day, when, after miles of swift travel, the Caravan sighted the adobe walls of Gen. Vaile's home.

A number of horsemen dashed out to meet the Caravan.

They were the jubilant cowboys, who had heard of the great victory. And when the Caravan rolled into the ranch yard, there was a surprise for all.

Upon the piazza, coolly smoking, sat Dexter, the detective.

"Great guns!" exclaimed Gen. Vaile. "Is that you, Dexter? We have hunted all over for you."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the merry detective. "I have been home for several hours."

"And your man—"

"Is locked up in the adobe cabin yonder. Oh, I have carried my point, and he goes East with me to-morrow."

All cheered at this glorious declaration, Dexter was modestly gratified.

It was a joyful party which filled the old ranch that night. None were more jubilant than Gen. Vaile.

Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp and the detective, Dexter, were the heroes of the hour.

But plucky little Carlotta also came in for a deserved meed of praise for her brave work with the Apaches.

The next morning Alvin Dexter took Maxwell, the murderer, back East. Two months later he expiated his crimes on the scaffold.

Dexter gained fame and reward for his brave work. But he shrugged his shoulders and declared:

"Pshaw! I never could have succeeded if it had not been for Frank Reade, Jr., and his Electric Caravan. I tell you that young man is the wonder of this age."

Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney and Pomp, with the Caravan, stayed a week longer at the Black River Ranch.

This was long enough to witness the happy marriage of Haven Reed and bright little Carlotta.

The work of the Caravan on Black Range yielded permanent results.

The Greasers never returned to make Broken Bar a rendezvous, and the Apaches, lacking the co-operation of their white allies, retired beyond the mountains.

Gen. Vaile recovered most of his cattle, and once more prosperity shone upon the broad wastes of the Black Range.

The Caravan took a southward trip, and after seeing the greater part of New Mexico, Frank returned to Readestown.

The trip and the Caravan had proved a success in every sense of the term. And with this announcement, dear reader, comes our story to

[THE END.]

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